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Galaxy

SCIENCE FICTION

WILLIAM WALLING

MEMO TO THE LEADER

Roger Zelazny's last Amber saga

THE COURTS OF CHAOS

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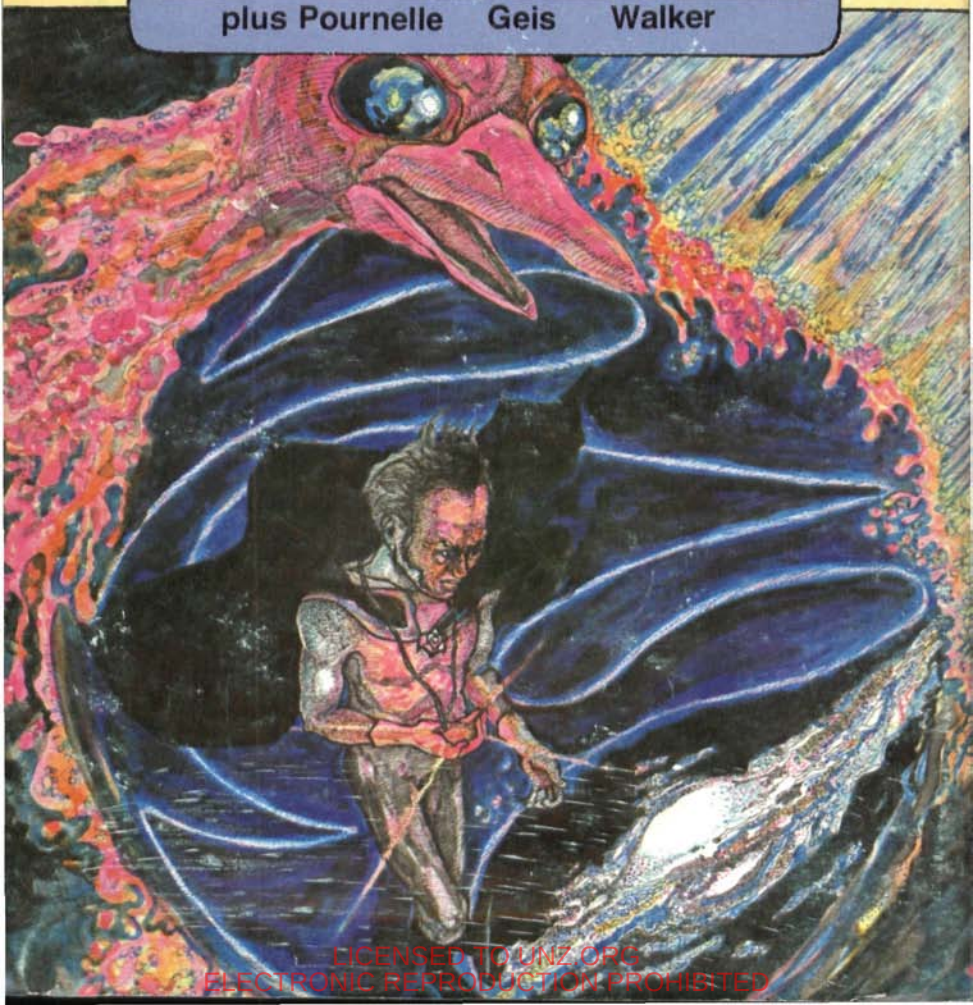

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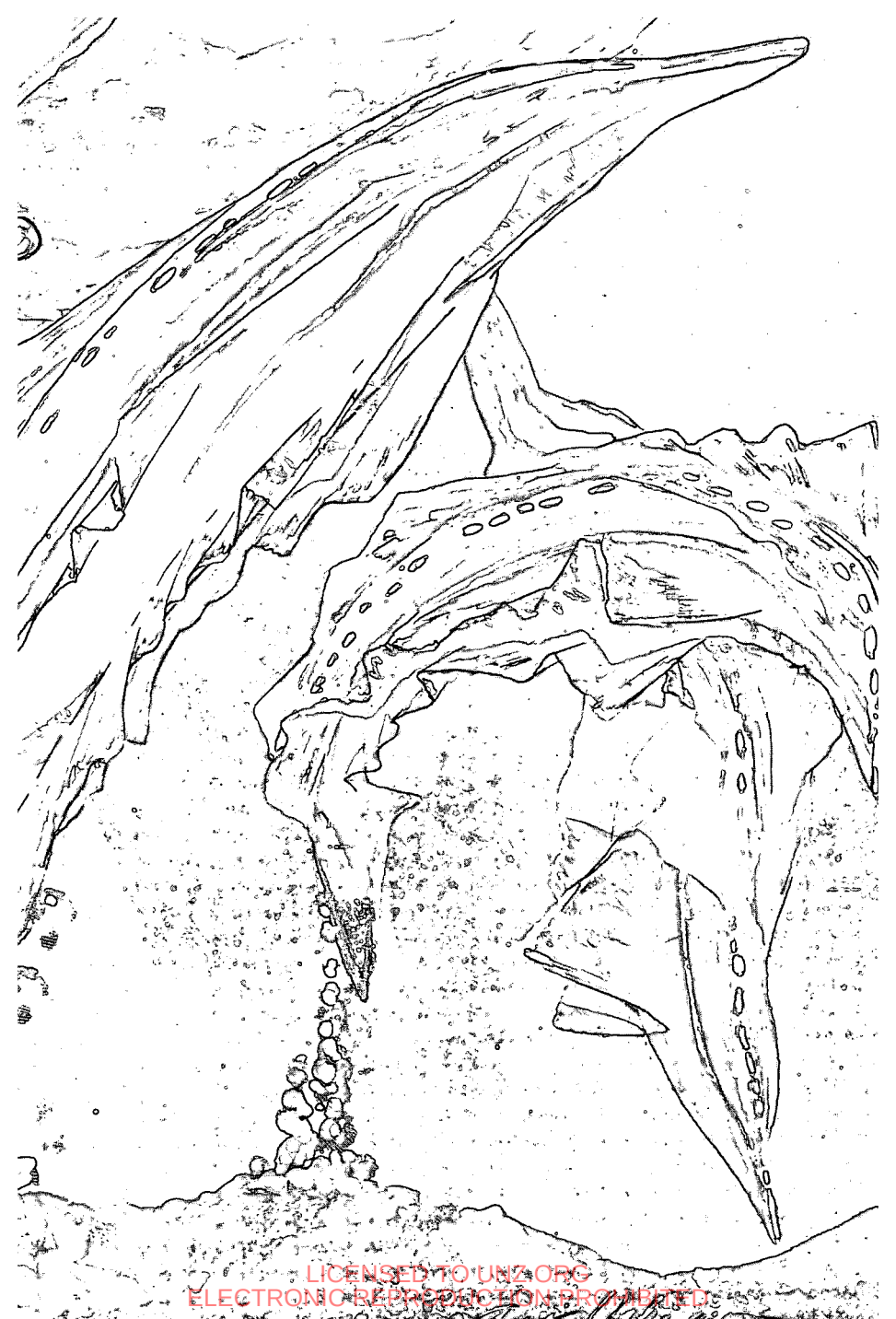

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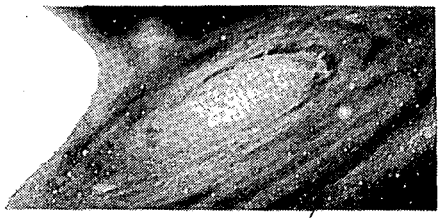

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NOVELLA

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MEMO TO THE LEADER

William Walling

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Anyone can change the past, if he can reach it. But he'd better be careful how . . . .

THE TRULY TERRIFYING thing about imprisonment was the loneliness.

Silverthorne's captors treated him with neither kindness nor unkindness, neither respect nor disrespect. Their detachment made his existence pointless, his confinement inhuman, as if he were already dead. In a sense this was true; he was buried—and far better dead. But even the solace of oblivion was denied him.

Stolid guards delivered and retrieved thrice-daily meals, rarely uttering a single syllable since few, if any, knew French or German. And certainly not the archaic peasant tongue once known as English. Each day at mid-afternoon he was escorted from the cell to an exercise cubicle hewn from living rock. He shuffled to and fro and did simple calisthenics while guards armed with sub-machine guns idled in the granite archway. Even then he was taken down a side passageway; he saw no other prisoners. Ever.

The days dragged by in sunless isolation—hopeless days strung together end-to-end to form empty months, vacuous years. James Silverthorne had time—all the time there was—to examine the circumstances that had precipitated the Great Mistake. Everlastingly, elliptically, he relived the complex events leading to the brink, second-guessing his part in them, then second-guessing his second-guessing until eventually the riddle had neither beginning nor end and the reflexive second-guessing crowded his mind full circle in shadowy labyrinths.

Perhpas if he had firmly refused to go, had simply said "No!" to Bernard Omsley on that fateful night, it might have sufficed.

Perhaps not.

For the night Omsley dropped by had made a beginning . . . .

* * *

At precisely seven o'clock on a cool September evening in *Deutsches Weltanreichsjahr* 142—more properly 2075, remembering the Gregorian calendar—while carving roast lamb and chatting with his guests, the *Gauleiter* of Greater Denver and *Frau* Kästner, Professor James Silverthorne was startled to hear an aircar touch down gently on the roofpark of his mountain villa.

A chill crawled between his shoulder blades for he knew without considering the matter who it was. *Why in God's name had Bernard chosen this particular moment to pay a surprise call?*

Gauleiter Kästner seemed oblivi-

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ous to the barely audible thump overhead though Silverthorne's wife, Emily, shot James a wary glance over the rim of her wineglass. Careful to make no outward sign of awareness, Silverthorne continued his anecdote—a tidbit of *Sans Souci* bedroom intrigue garnered during a recent junket to the court of Frederick the Great—with all the nonchalance he could muster. At the first opportunity, Emily excused herself and went into the kitchen.

"Simply fascinating," said Kästner, clicking his tongue. "You are singularly fortunate to have actually walked the earth during such a rich era. We shall expect a book about *Friedrich,* no?"

"I'm anxious to begin it," said Silverthorne, covertly studying the other's manner. The *Gauleiter* seemed relaxed, little resembling the vain, thoroughly Americanized ogre who gave audience in that pompously furnished office overlooking the old Denver Civic Center—now *Erwin Rommel Platz* —with its *Waffen SS* shrine where larger-than-life bronze figures of Sepp Dietrich and Jochen Peiper pondered some eternal battlefield from beside the ugly, eighty-eight millimeter snout of a King Tiger tank's gun turret.

Although he detested the corpulent official, Silverthorne's chair of Temporal Research at *Goebbels Institut,* as well as the revolutionary conspiracy in which he was deeply embroiled, demanded that he and Emily entertain the Kästners on occasion. James had met but a handful of *Herrenvolk* in his thirty-seven years; most had been political nulls—scholars and educators like himself—not German-born aristocrats of Kästner's stamp. The *Gauleiter* embodied the casual arrogance of a Berliner born and bred. But his pedigree was tainted; Silverthorne had reason to suspect the Heidelberg scar disfiguring the tyrant's jowl was a product of in-party surgery rather than a dueling sabre's mark of honor.

Emily returned, offering a lackluster smile. "Bernard is here," she said in an uncertain voice.

The older educator trailed her, his manner frankly embarrassed. "Forgive the intrusion," he said, standing in the doorway. "I should have called first. I had no idea you'd be entertaining guests. I've, uh, rather important news . . . both sorts."

"Always delighted to see you, Bernard. Come have some wine. I believe you already know *Herr Doktor und Frau* Kästner."

Acknowledging Omsley's bow with a tip of his head, the *Gualeiter* smiled only with his lips. "Say, I thought I heard someone land a moment ago! How are things at the *Institut?* Herr Omsley heads the History Department," he reminded his wife, "as well as our Temporal Research Program."

Frau Kästner nodded, looking vaguely suspicious.

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"The department practically runs itself, sir. The, er, reason I've bothered you . . ." Omsley hesitated. "Jamie, I'm sorry to have to tell you our petition has been denied by *Reichskounzel*. You won't be allowed to go back and visit the War Years after all."

Silverthorne cringed inside himself. "That's . . . definite?"

"I'm afraid so."

Struggling to mask his disappointment, James said, "You mentioned you had both sorts of news, Bernard?"

Omsley brightened. "Yes. The thorium expenditure for your long jump to Augustan Rome has been sanctioned," he said. "*Arminium,* the battle of *Teutoberger Wald,* the birth of Germanic—"

"*Hermann,*" corrected the *Gauleiter* vehemently, "not 'Ar*minius*'! '*Arminius*' once signified the Latinized, mongrelized barbarian who belonged to Rome. *Hermann der Cherusca* was the hero's proper name. He realized the folly of his allegiance to Rome, returned to the *Cherusci* and led them to brilliant victory over Varus and three entire legions. There is a *vast* difference."

"*Natürlich, Herr Gauleiter.*" Omsley looked contrite.

Kästner barked a hearty laugh. "Here am I," he said, patting his wife's hand, "lecturing a pair of famous history professors. Doesn't that strike you as droll, my dear?"

Frau Kästner managed a perplexed nod as the corpulent *Gauleiter* put down his glass—his fifth serving of California *Gewürtz Traminer*—and rose with difficulty, fiddling with the handle of the *SS* dagger at his belt. "Jamie," he said expansively, "you must understand something. Your remarkable career in temporal research has not gone unnoticed by the *Reich's* heirarchy nor, I might add, has it gone unrewarded. But the policy of allowing only selected German-born party members to revisit the War Years is quite firm. I can't imagine what prompted you to bother petitioning *Reichskounzel*. There was no hope—never."

"I suppose that's difficult for me to understand, sir." James lifted his hands in frustration. "History is my lifework. Not to be allowed to practice it in the field is—"

"Ah, but we must be realistic." The *Gauleiter* stamped his foot in vexation. "The young *Reich* was in dire straits when Dr. Lebe was captured. The so-called Allies had been forewarned of secret weapons—rockets, atomic bombs, that sort of thing—never in their wildest imaginings suspecting a 'secret weapon' like the Lebe Technique. Complacent in victory, they allowed Erich Lebe to return from his Soviet nightmare to a conquered, plundered, sundered Germany.

"I shan't bore you by retelling the saga—the achievements of dedicated geniuses who labored twenty-eight years perfecting the

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mechanics of temporal displacement, Franz Lustmann's heroic probe of the unknown that shaped our modern world. That, gentlemen, is history!''

Kästner smacked his lips, savoring the moment. ''The *Reichsführer, Reichsleiter* and *Reichskounzel* are forsworn to guard the immutability of that history. Quite understandable, is it not? Safeguarding the doorway to the past is a sacred responsibility.''

''You're correct, of course, *Herr Gauleiter*,'' said Silverthorne. ''Though it's galling not to be trusted.''

''Trust?'' Kästner huffed with self-importance. ''Some things, my dear Silverthorne, are too important to entrust to *any* individual. We go back into our past only to learn—never to touch, disturb or mutilate. The reflexive dangers of promiscuous time travel would be overwhelming.''

Trying hard to look impressed, Omsley coughed politely into his cupped hand. ''An absolutely sound policy, sir. Let me apologize once again for intruding. I really should be running along.''

''Not at all, Omsley.'' The official waved airily and sat down to resume his assault on Silverthorne's wine rack. ''Let us know the details of your projects from time to time, eh?''

''Thank you, sir. I shall.''

''I'll walk you to your aircar, Bernard.'' Silverthorne bowed toward the Kästners. ''Will you excuse us?''

* * *

They rode upward in the lift, not speaking as if by mutual agreement. Stepping outdoors on the roofpark, they could see the outskirts of Greater Denver *Gauleitung* forming a sprinkle of lights northward while the Rampart Range reared stark and rugged against the azure Colorado twilight.

James Silverthorne was scowling. ''That tears it!'' he said. ''I suppose there's no way to appeal *Reichskounzel's* decision.''

Omsley's low-voiced response amazed him. ''You're going.''

''What? But you told me—''

''Shush-h-h! You'll go exactly as planned,'' said the older man, ''with one glaring difference—forget about leaving from the Carlsbad Caverns site. Faking a Roman time-jump would never work. Their bloodhounds would sniff out the variance in energy expended on a shorter junket. You'll be going from orbit. Temporal displacement of a double will make the figures balance at Carlsbad.''

''Orbit? It's *that* desperate?''

''Desperate indeed!'' Omsley slowed his walk, looking directly into Silverthorne's eyes. When he spoke, his tone was soft, biting. ''Jamie, this *Reich* of theirs makes medieval feudalism look downright permissive by comparison. It's noth-

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ing but monolithic, iron-handed domination of the entire globe and every human being on it. You *must* go back, you *must* succeed. Powell volunteered to double for you at last night's cell meeting."

Silverthorne's mind was racing. "Bernard, how in hell do I get into orbit? Or *down,* for that matter?"

"Henderson has developed an ablative pressure suit," explained Omsley. "You'll be put aboard a shuttle to *Walküre* Space Station, posing as a purser. Good thing your German's excellent."

"Whew! You're scaring me, Bernard. Not certain I can be expected to do acrobatics or—"

"We haven't much time," said Omsley, paying no heed to Silverthorne's objections. "*Sicherheitsdienst* and *Gestapo* are both close behind us. Graham was picked up night before last. They've broken three other high-ranked cells during as many months. That's why I barged in this evening under Tubby's nose. Our charade may lull his suspicions."

"Um, maybe. I wouldn't count on it. You were saying . . . ?"

"The temporal device is already aboard *Walküre*," pursued the other. "The necessary few grams of thorium isotope are in a convenience locker, waiting for you. I won't tell you how many lives that thorium cost us. But your jump's short, Jamie—less than a century and a half. Henny has it all arranged."

"And I'll come down where? More important, *when*?"

Omsley pursed his lips. "Central Europe is all Henderson can promise, sometime between February and June, nineteen forty."

"Forty? Sounds a bit premature to me. We've no way of being certain?"

"None," said Bernard Omsley. "Arguments have raged for decades over whether to aim for a later or an earlier period in the War. The answer lies somewhere in their archives, for all the good *that* does. We have Goebbels' pretentious tomes, plus the works of those other Nazi bores. How much is true? Your guess is as valid as anyone's.

"The alliances with Italy and Japan can probably be taken for granted. Recovering the Sudetenland, annexing Austria, swallowing Czechoslovakia and overrunning Poland all seem likely. But that lightning strike through the Ardennes, the quick collapse of the low countries and France, sound too pat.

"Then we are told England lost an entire army on the beach at Dunkirk, that the *Wehrmacht* won a glorious triumph over British shore defenses in the Sea Lion channel crossing, consolidated the western territories for a year, then turned eastward, violating the Soviet Pact, and decimated Byelorussia and the Ukraine. Kiev, Kharkov, Stalingrad and Leningrad were devastated. Moscow was totally obliterated from the air. Victory piled upon

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victory! Who can believe. . .''

''Their . . . 'history' is damned hard to swallow.''

''An understatement, Jamie.'' Omsley turned his back to the breeze, cupping his hands to light a cigarette. ''But who can argue with films of Rommel's *Panzers* rolling through Alexandria to the Suez, of flaming American B-36's that braved the Atlantic to thrust at Germany's heartland, or the V-4 rocket strikes on New York, Chicago, even Los Angeles?

''And the final duplicities after President Dewey's capitulation—Nazi atomic warheads raining on Nagasaki and Tokyo-Yokohama, with once-proud Italy a vassal state.''

James Silverthorne shivered slightly although the night was mild. ''And I'm supposed to change all that, single-handed? How?''

''You'll have to play it by ear, Jamie. No one ever said it would be easy. You and your talents are probably our single remaining trump. We must play it now, however long the odds, or possibly relinquish it forever and make their *Tausendjahr Reich* a reality. You must admit they've made one helluva start!''

Silverthorne's eyes narrowed. ''I think Kästner was teasing us downstairs,'' he said slowly. ''He said something about a 'sundered' Germany. Wonder what he could've meant by that: Bernard, this whole scheme is crazy! Franz Lustmann went back and reshuffled the deck, altered the outcome of the War. I'll wager that fat slug downstairs knows *precisely* how it was done.''

Omsley shrugged. ''Undoubtedly. But don't waste your hatred on Tubby. He's the most completely Americanized *Gauleiter* in the country. Warring cultures collide, Jamie. Neither the victors nor the vanquished escape unchanged. You'll have to admit Kästner has been a valuable asset, if you want to be objective about it.

''The vital thing to remember is this—Lustmann's venture was *successful*. If it can be done once, it can be done again.''

''Can it?'' objected Silverthorne with no little sarcasm. ''Lustmann returned carrying encyclopedic data about the *real* War. He faced a monumental task, granted. But compared to mine, it was—''

''I know, I know,'' said Omsley quickly. ''But it isn't hopeless. Lustmann's a demi-god in their pantheon, a world hero. Every schoolchild in five continents learns to venerate that face. We've made a fair inference where he went and approximately when.''

Silverthorne groaned. ''Bernard, he was *somewhere* in Europe *sometime* between nineteen thirty-three and nineteen fifty. It will be much, much worse than searching for the proverbial needle. And if I *should* find him—''

''He was in Berlin,'' snapped Omsley, ''about the middle of nine-

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teen forty. We're staking everything on that fact and you'd better accustom yourself to believing it."

Silverthorne's grunt was noncommital.

"Sorry," said the other with a sigh. "Let me finish. We've rounded together every authentic twentieth-century *Reichsmark* we could beg, borrow or pilger. It comes to only a few thousand but that's enough to keep you from starving until you can steal—or earn—some more. There's a little jewelry too and papers presenting you as an Austrian or Italian freelance correspondent. Select the most appropriate when you ground, then burn the other papers.

"Henderson has made provision for two hundred and twenty pounds of transposable mass—you and everything inside your p-suit, including *Lederhosen* and a rucksack. Pass yourself off as a goldbrick hiking about on a *Wanderjahr* until you atemporize. And I want you to spend lots of extra time on that. You spent mere days before getting to work in eighteenth-century Potsdam. But that was only research. This jump is for keeps!"

Omsley stepped on his cigarette, then opened the hatch of his seven-place aircar. He held out his hand. "*Hals und Beinbruch*!"

Silverthorne stood with the breeze tousling his hair, shaking his colleague's hand. He felt enormous apprehension. "Sounds like I may break my fool neck as well," he said. "Are you going to Carlsbad with Powell?"

Omsley's nod was curt. "In the morning. We hope to get him off by nightfall. Henderson's man will collect you about noon, take you over to *Raketenflugplatz* and see you aboard the shuttle. Be ready, Jamie. We're counting on you."

Silverthorne's head bobbed woodenly. "I'll be waiting. Luck!"

"And to you, Jamie. I expect we'll both need all we can get."

Silverthorne stepped back as Omsley lighted the glowcoils and wound up the first-state turbines. The engines caught, continued their octave-by-octave climbing whine. With a sharp premonition of finality, he watched the aircar vector away into the darkness.

Downstairs, when the lift door opened, he constructed an ingratiating smile for the wine-swilling *Gauleiter* and his lumpish woman, discovering that his appetite had fled.

* * *

"Braun, you slow-witted sluggard! We dock in ten minutes. I want that freight manifest reconciled. You hear?"

Suppressing a curse, Purser Braun-Silverthorne flung aside the squeezebottle of coffee. "*Jawohl, Herr Dries.*" He hooked a belt ring to the aft-going safety line per regulations and pulled himself smartly down the companionway, fuming.

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Neither Omsley nor Henderson's man had bothered to tell him that the chief purser—a loudmouthed bully with a natural bent for tormenting underlings—was not privy to the conspiracy. The chief purser had made Silverthorne's life miserable ever since liftoff.

He groped his way into "G" cargo hold, hating weightlessness and its uncertainties. He had also learned to despise the close confines and unappetizing smells of the earth-to-orbit shuttle *Mecklenburg*. The shuttle would be maneuvering to dock with *Walküre* Space Station at any instant and he wondered if he would be able to hear the acceleration warning while floating about down below in the craft's bowels.

Silverthorne made a wry face and searched out the nearest convenient handhold, then began checking off numbered cargo modules against a manifest. Emily was in his thoughts. She had not been easy to deceive; she knew him too well. There had been no safe way to tell her the truth, of course. They had kissed good-bye on the roofpark in the blaze of noon, she believing him bound on a research junket to Augustan Rome. Hazardous, yes, but he had convinced her (as he always managed to do) that the experience he had acquired in visiting one era or another tended to lessen the manifold dangers involved. Emily had gone along, as was her customary pretense. She knew that he never took chances on any junket and that he was even more careful in antiquity.

The sly grate of the opening hatch made Silverthorne pause. That devil of a chief purser again, no doubt, sneaking around looking for an excuse to make life even more hellish. Well, this time the bastard would find Purser Braun hard at work.

A rumbling voice behind him said, "Jamie."

Silverthorne whipped himself about. "Henderson?" The red-haired man had grown a wispy auburn beard since their last encounter. He was carrying a medical valise and seemed to be in a hurry. "What the hell are *you* doing aboard?"

Henderson closed and battened the hatch before answering. "Lost your taste for blondes, Professor? Or maybe you didn't notice that platinum witch making eyes at you just after liftoff."

"I . . . no. Was I supposed to?"

The other's grin was fleet, wolfish. "Anyone who's still warm would notice Helga. We were trying to get you aside and cue you, Jamie. The scheme has gone sour. Looks like we're in a footrace."

Silverthorne's throat constricted. "To . . . get me off?"

"Right. We're still in the ball game but it will be touch and go." Henderson snapped open the black bag. "Here," he directed, "doff that silly uniform and put these

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on." He held out shorts and a singlet. "You're becoming a passenger—a cardiac patient bound for Luna. Helga's going to be your nurse."

Silverthorne glanced anxiously toward the hatch. "Henny, the chief purser is liable to poke his nose in here and—"

"Uh-uh," Henderson interrupted. "The chief purser got kind of sleepy a while ago. He won't bother anyone for hours. Hurry! We want to be ready when this bucket mates with the station."

A warning klaxon groaned distantly, catching Silverthorne dressing. Awkwardly he followed Henderson to a stanchion rising from among the stacked and shackled cargo modules. Both men seized handholds; a mild surge of weight and the conducted thunder of thrusters came and went. There was another brief burst, then a mild jar. A sighing chuff of air announced the shuttle's docking.

"Relax a minute," said Henderson, " 'till the passengers begin to disembark. Helga has some medical stage props waiting inboard. Be sure to let me tow you up into the freefall rigging—and make it look good, *real* good."

The transverse companionway leading inboard from the working decks was deserted and they encountered no one until entering the main passageway. Silverthorne let "Doctor" Henderson precede him, pulling himself hand-over-hand along the line toward the airlock.

Suddenly Henderson checked himself. He yawed about, tight-lipped. "Look behind me," he said. "What do you see?"

Silverthorne peered over Henderson's shoulder toward the lock chamber that interfaced the shuttle and *Walküre* Space Station. Three men and a blonde nurse were floating near the freefall rigging that was now aswarm with off-loading passengers. One of the men casually held the pretty nurse's arm. "Helga's been scragged."

"Damn." Henderson doubled his fists. "Last of the ninth, one out and no one on base. All we can do is sacrifice. Now listen, and listen good, Professor. Omsley and Powell were picked up this morning at Carlsbad. Powell suicided but Bernard . . . don't suppose you knew but Bernard's a Catholic."

"I . . . no, I didn't know. He'll be made to talk."

"Yeah. If he hasn't already." Henderson swore bitterly. "They were at your home about three hours before this bucket lifted off. That's why I came along. We got Emily safely underground so don't fret about her. But I'm afraid they got a good fix on me. I had to ventilate one of 'em to get away."

"I . . . I'll never be able to thank you, Henny!"

"So don't try. Now stamp this in your memory. The thorium is in locker 429, third tier to the left, in the transient passengers' lounge.

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Here's the key. Take the thorium down to the nadir stack—we're in a zenith berth here—and look up a maintenance tech named Faigele. Tell him a dirty joke so's he'll know who you are. He'll get your p-suit, thruster bottle and other gear and show you which airlock to use. Wearing your false tooth?"

Silverthorne nodded.

"Okay, here's your return ticket. It's pre-tuned." Henderson rummaged in the valise and passed over a small capsule. "Just like on all your other trips, Professor. Twist the tooth to the right and your accumulated temporal potential will flex you back into Carlsbad's receptor field like an unleashed rubber band."

Henderson's lips worked as he felt for something deeper in the satchel. There was a barely audible click. The redhead smiled ruefully. "Guess this's the way she falls out. Don't feel bad. I've got some scores to settle."

Silverthorne had seen the hastily wrapped dynamite sticks. He said nothing.

"One more quick word," said Henderson, "then you better scat before we begin to attract attention. They may call my bluff and shoot me straight off. I'll try to buy you ten or fifteen minutes.

"When you're suited up and outside, lower the reticle in your headpiece and center Polaris, then hit the red chin lever. Transfer injection will put you in a ninety-four-mile perigee. You're more or less phased in synch with earthspin, nineteen-forty—close as we could calculate, anyhow—and from what I saw during ascent boost, you should have about a half-hour wait until you see yourself coming up on Europe.

"When the British Isles roll over the limb, turn one-eighty degrees to your line of flight and chin the yellow lever. If there's cloud cover, you'll have to interpolate your position from whatever terrain you're able to see. Okay?"

"Got it."

Henderson grunted approval. "The retro sequence will kick hell out of you," he warned. "You won't mass much but you'll have lots of kinetic. Then comes the heat wave, don't let it scare you. An aneroid switch will trigger temporal transition at about thirteen thousand feet—take you right out of your p-suit—hopefully over Germany, Austria or Hungary. For Chrissakes, watch out for mountains! If you come down over the Alps, the Dolomites or whatever, you'll have to do some fancy riser work to spill air and change direction. That could get sticky. Pop your chute as soon after transition as you get your bearings. Have all that?"

"I think so, Henny."

"Great! Shake my mitt, Jamie, then beat it out the cargo hatch and don't look back. Remember, we're all betting on you!"

Silverthorne clasped Henderson's

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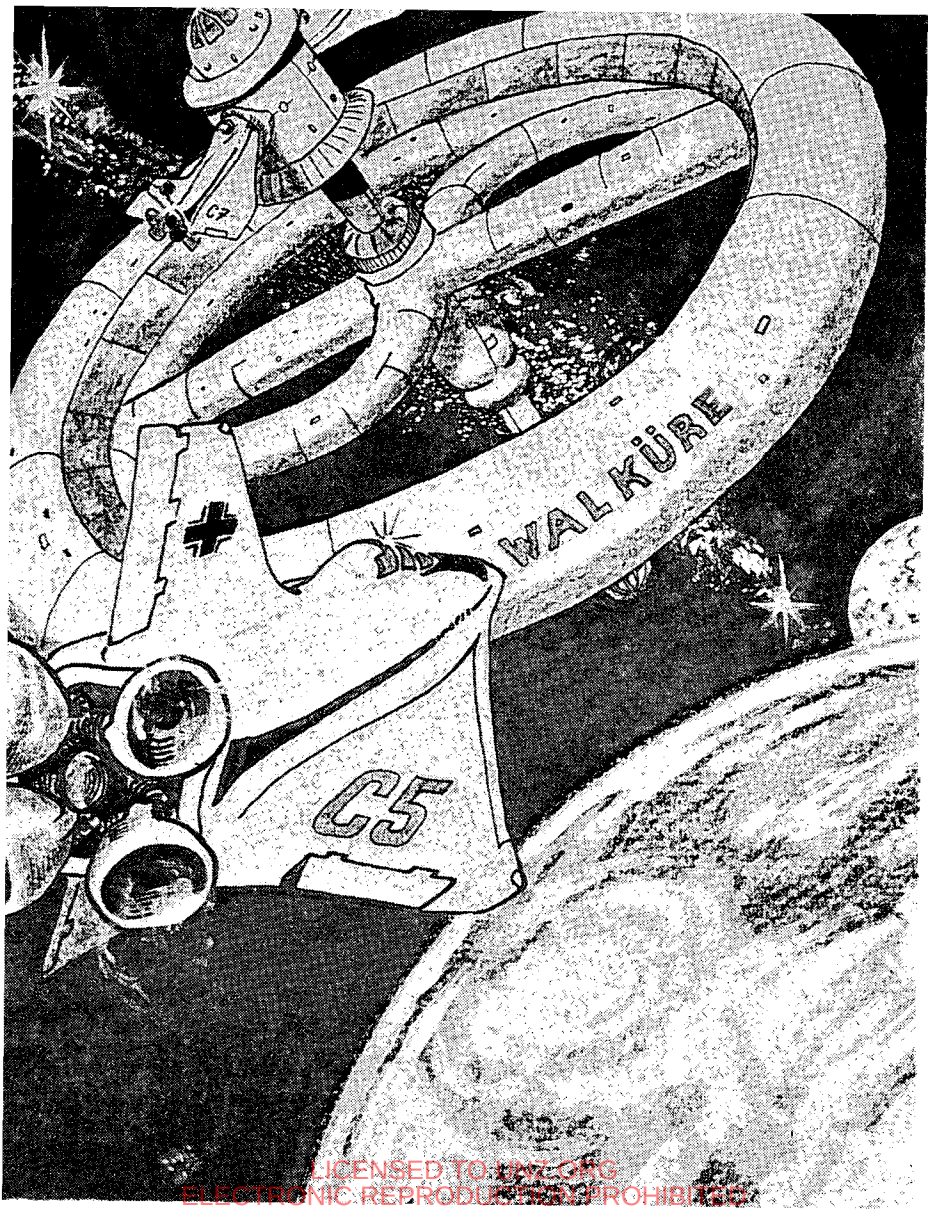

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free hand, smiling gratefully although his eyes were misted. He whirled and tugged himself back along the freefall safety line.

* * *

He wended his way aft like an agile spider, near-colliding with a pair of crewmen who swore after him, not giving chase because they took him for a passenger. He snubbed to a stop at the main passageway, burning his hands on the nylon line, and cautiously peeked around the corner. A long procession of slowly moving cargo modules was being conveyored through the deserted passageway and "up" into *Walküre* Space Station.

He jerked back his head. Two bland-faced *Gestapo* assassins were guarding the cargo hatch.

Silverthorne's mind raced. Henderson had promised only minutes, several of which had already fled. It would be hopeless to try bluffing past two professionals. He hadn't worked out in a freefall gym for years and his chances of physically handling one of them, not to mention the other, were close to nil.

He stiffened, muttering, "Of course!" and pulled himself back down the passageway. Four stevedores were emptying "D" hold, preparing to move the conveyor head into "E." He prayed as he opened "G" compartment's hatch. The prayer was answered; no one was there.

He flew to the cargo stack, finding the purser's uniform still wadded between two modules. He almost tore it in pulling it on over the shorts and singlet. Then he smoothed his hair, donned the cap and was back in the passageway in seconds.

Silverthorne breathed deeply, rehearsing the scene in his mind. How would it play best? Sincerity? No, not with *Gestapo*. His best bet might be to pretend willy-nilly, scatterbrained agitation—if he could summon the guts to pull it off.

He rounded the corner and snubbed, gave one long-armed tug toward the cargo hatch in the manner of an old spacehand and sailed blithely into the rigging. The net recovered from the impetus of his plunge, going slack. He reached for an "upper" rung.

"You seemed awfully rushed," said the man in the gray jumpsuit. "May I have a look at your papers, *bitte*?"

Silverthorne glanced at the swastika-bordered *Sicherheitsdienst* medallion in the man's open palm. Not *Gestapo* after all. These were *SD*—real pros! "Of course, sir." He hooked an elbow through the rigging and tugged out his wallet.

The SD man looked over the forged spaceman's papers. "Braun, Wilhelm G.," he said boredly. "He would seem to be a purser."

The man's partner consulted a

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list. "Where were you born?"

"Düsseldorf, sir."

"Ah, yes. And why such a sweat to get inboard, Wilhelm?"

'Silverthorne swallowed a lump. "I . . . there's a young lady—a passenger." He looked from one agent to the other. "You've never seen such a *Schätze*! I, er, must be back in fifteen minutes—the cargo, you know."

The man in the gray jumpsuit snickered unpleasantly, returning Silverthorne's wallet. "Don't you know crewmen aren't supposed to chase passengers, Braun? Oh, I suppose we can't interfere with your love life, can we? Run along, though a quarter-hour tryst seems hardly worth the effort. Come back promptly or we'll be looking for you. *Versteh's du*?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." Silverthorne swarmed "up" the rigging. *Look for me in fifteen minutes, you son-of-a-bitch, and you'll have some search!*

He ducked into the first washroom he encountered along the hub corridor, shucked the uniform in a booth, came out and stuffed it into a waste receptacle, then zipped along the freefall safety line toward the spin elevators. He encountered only a few stevedores and stray crewmen from the *Mecklenburg*, none of whom gave him a second glance. Beyond the interlock chamber connecting the berthing stack with the station proper, the area became more populated.

He fidgeted during the interminable wait while the elevator matched spin with the passenger terminal, underwent a momentary pang of coriolis-induced dizziness, then relaxed as weight returned to his feet. Joining the stream of passengers shopping along the midway, he kept his head down, trying to make his haste inconspicious. He turned right into the large alcove adjacent ot the transient lounge, wishing he had time to reconnoiter before moving toward the locker. But seconds were dribbling away into precious minutes.

Silverthorne pulled the key from the singlet's slash pocket. Locker 429 opened easily to reveal a small, innocent-looking cube of dark material. He remembered to breathe again, offering Omsley a heart-felt mental salute. Bernard had either managed to hold out or purposely refrained from learning the locker's number or location. The latter seemed more likely, knowing his thoroughness.

The cube was oddly difficult to manage; neither shorts nor singlet afforded an adequate pocket. He was forced to carry the lead-shielded nugget of thorium isotope against his leg. It spoiled his gait in the centripetal gee field, lending him an eccentric lope.

The elevator at last spun to a stop and a zero-gee warning sign blinked to remind him to use the freefall safety rigging. He hugged the thorium close and caught a line, this

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time heading "down" into the nadir berthing stack.

He had just cleared the interlock chamber when an alarm squalled through the stack. An iris opening of resilient material squeezed shut behind him, then heavy doors rumbled closed. His margin of safety had been a matter of only feet.

Silverthorne pressed on, ignoring the stevedores and techs who swam idly into the main corridor, curious about the commotion inboard. He caught the eye of a man who wore pale green coveralls with the "Raumhansa" stitched over his heart. "Pardon. Know where I can find a tech named Faigele?"

"Chris Faigele? Sure. Maintenance depot, beyond bulkhead sixty-one."

"*Vielen dank.*"

"Say, friend," Raumhansa called after him, "what's going on inboard? Why have they sealed up?"

"Sorry, I've no idea." Silverthorne pulled his way along the stack. Bulkhead 56, 57 . . . . He ticked off three more and clasped the nylon line to slow his plunge. God, there couldn't be much time left. But there it was—bulkhead 61!

He followed a transverse line leading into an open hatchway. A dozen jumpsuited technicians radiated in all attitudes around a squawkbox, listening to a blaring announcement of some sort. Before Silverthorne could approach them, someone grasped his arm. "This way."

"Skip the joke," called the tech over his shoulder. "I've heard them all. I didn't think you were going to make it."

"Neither did I." Silverthorne followed the man in a series of caroms from handhold to handhold through several compartments crowded with electronic consoles. They entered a small airlock service-chamber containing racks of tools. A number of slack presure suits were stowed along the curving bulkhead.

Faigele battened the hatch. "What do you mass?"

"One seventy-six stripped," said Silverthorne.

"Um, close enough. Henny calculated to the ounce. Strip to the skin, if you will, and put these on. May I have the thorium?"

Silverthorne tore off his clothes, donning scratchy woolen underwear, well-worn *Lederhosen,* a linen shirt, knee-length socks and hiking boots. The rough tweed jacket had leather protective patches sewn at the elbows. He stuffed the Tyrolean felt hat with a feather in its brim into the jacket's pocket.

Faigele was holding out a battered canvas rucksack. "Strap it around your middle. The chute's a backpack. Easy now!" The tech fastened an aluminum band housing the temporal generator under Silverthorne's arms, then did up the fast-disconnect clamps. "Comfortable? Now the chute, then we'll—"

Something nudged *Walküre* Space Station with savage force. A low-

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frequency conducted rumble rattled loose equipment.

Silverthorne cried, "Henderson!"

Faigele's nod was solemn. "*Ja,* there was a report of a man with a bomb in the zenith stack. I assumed he was Henny. Come! We'll take advantage of the confusion. Radar might miss you altogether during the hubbub."

Silverthorne floated behind Faigele to a rack of pressure suits, allowing the man to help cram him—gear, chute, temporal device and all—into a strangely bulky p-suit. Only a two-inch peephole remained in the fishbowl; the remainder had been opaqued with a thickly sprayed white gunk.

"Hurry!" Faigele motioned for him to turn and attached a large thruster bottle to the suit's rear mounting pads. "Try your red chin lever now."

Silverthorne glanced in the prism viewer above his forehead. The red lever was on the left. He craned to depress it.

"*Ganz gut*! You have juice to the squib." Faigele twisted home the electrical connector. "Red's for transfer orbit. Yellow's for retro. Henny gave you the drill, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"I'll seal you then, and you're on your way. Luck!"

Silverthorne bumbled and clanged his way into the airlock like an ungainly teddy bear. He fretted, hearing the conducted hum of pumps scavenging air, feeling uncomfortable swaddled like a baby in the heavy outdoor clothing.

The sound of pumps dwindled, died. He waited until the light winked green and the outer hatch cycled open, felt for the handhold, took one agonized breath and pulled himself into the endless night.

Three vessels limned in earthlight were berthed in the nadir stick—a pair of dartlike shuttles and a blunt-ended space-to-space lunar transport. He clutched the rung of the handhold. There was nothing "beneath" him but Earth—immense, cloud-draped and lovely.

Silverthorne wrenched himself about and grabbed another rung, managing to lock both boots against the station's skin. Then, squatting he flexed the knee joints to the limit of the p-suit's articulation. Letting go, he drove hard with both legs and suddenly he was flying through vacuum with no sense of motion whatsoever. He waited until his modest momentum had carried him far enough out that he would not be a primary radar object in the station's traffic-control monitors; then he threw out an arm and a leg on the left side. The resultant gradually spun him. He lowered the reticle in his headpiece by adroit use of his chin and searched for the Pole Star, a task make difficult by the tiny window in the fishbowl's thermal compound.

There was Gemini. He corrected the residual axial spin, throwing his

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head back against the padded rest. The Dipper crawled into view. When Polaris swam into the reticle, he stabilized awkwardly and chinned the red lever. A mild roar beat in his ears. A strong, steady shove imparted pressure to the small of his back.

Professor James Silverthorne was on his way.

* * *

He almost made it across the unpaved cowtrail of a road he had spotted from on high but the wind refused to carry the chute as far as he thought it would. Instead of landing in the inviting meadow, he fell among a clump of shaggy firs bordering the forest.

Instinctively he raised one arm to protect his face, sensing fragrant boughs whip past. Then, with a wrenching jar, he was hanging in the late-morning sunshine, listening to the wind soughing among the branches.

The ripped chute was neatly impaled on a treetop perhaps twenty feet above his head. The ground below was obscured by spreading limbs but judging from a patch of meadow visible across the fenced road, he was no more than ten or fifteen feet above ground. Not being able to see below made things difficult; a fence, a hay rick or even a farmer's bull could be under the tree.

"*Da ist er*!" cried a childish voice. Two boys in their early teens ran up the rutted road toward him to join a third, younger boy who excitedly pointed upward. Silverthorne was filled with wild elation; the boy had shouted in German! Switzerland, Austria or possibly even Germany itself!

"Are you able to get down, sir?" called one of the boys.

"I think so. What lies underneath this limb?"

"Oh, nothing but grass," assured the youngest.

"Stand back, then." Silverthorne relaxed and undid the parachute's chest catch, raising his arms to slide out of the harness. The fir limb dropped beneath his weight. He pushed it aside as he fell, thrashing the air for balance, landing on his feet and rolling. "Whew! That last step is a crusher!"

"Are you hurt, *mein Herr*?"

"Not at all." Silverthorne gained his feet stiffly, smiling as he brushed himself off. "I'm glad you three came along when you did." He had no inkling what names Omsley had invented for him, having had no opportunity to open the rucksack and examine his phony papers. "I'm Wilhelm Braun. What are your names?"

The boys formally introduced themselves as Karl, Stefan and Heinz. Karl, the oldest, swept the sky with a puzzled squint. "We saw no aeroplane, Herr Braun. No machine was in sight when you drifted down."

Silverthorne held his smile; the

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choice of tales was limited. "It was a sailplane, Karl. I found myself trapped in an updraft and couldn't manage to lose altitude. It was then a question of jumping, freezing to death or suffocating from lack of air to breathe."

"*Wunderschöen!*" exclaimed young Heinz.

"Your craft was too high to be seen?" asked the persistent Karl.

"I was very high," confided Silverthorne, and that was certainly true enough.

"What is that strange thing around your waist, *Herr* Braun?"

"This? Oh, it's part of the belt that holds one in place while soaring." Silverthorne fingered the temporal generator's shell, now bereft of both generator and thorium isotope. "I jumped too quickly to bother disconnecting it."

"I shouldn't wonder that you were frightened, *Herr* Braun. *Very* frightened." Heinz was round-eyed.

"I must confess that I was," said Silverthorne, thinking that it had been more like naked terror than simple fear. He stretched, stamping the ground to settle the rucksack on his shoulders. "I must learn to be more careful. Well, my friends, which of you knows the way to the nearest town?"

"Winterlingen is down this road two kilometers, sir, though I've never heard it called a 'town' before." Karl was grinning.

"*Danke*. Say, my parachute seems torn beyond repair. You three may have it if you can figure out a way to get it down."

That notion excited the boys. They immediately began engineering methods of recovering the torn chute.

"*Wiedersehen*!" called Silverthorne over his shoulder. He swung a leg over the split-rail fence and set out along the cowtrail toward Winterlingen. It *was* Germany—no borders to cross! He congratulated himself, striding along through the gloomy fir forest in the best possible spirits. He was here, alive and well, strolling in the balmy sunshine of Adolf Hitler's *Dritte Reich*, which was still in its infancy if Henderson had done his homework properly.

Thoughts of the red-haired martyr saddened him. When the boys were out of sight, he went behind some trees to relieve himself, then eased the rucksack from his back. He removed the aluminum shell of the temporal device and hurled it into a heavy thicket, pocketed the currency, stowing the small handful of jewelry in an inside pocket, and examined the forged papers.

Was his German sufficiently accent-free that he could pass himself off as an Austrian? Probably. Austria was—would be?—an allied state if the *Anschluss* had already taken place. Tenses were something he would have to watch. Goebbels' pretentious tomes recording World War II were no longer a history to be taken for granted.

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Silverthorne thrilled again, mentally pinching himself. He studied the Austrian papers; he was now Hans Steyr, a free-lance correspondent from Salzburg. The photo, naturally, was one he'd had taken when applying for a *Vergangenkarte* in 2073. The Austrian cover would be much simpler than the other. His Italian was ragged and he no longer felt comfortable speaking it.

Mind made up, he found matches in the tweed jacket and burned the unneeded papers, smearing the ashes with the hell of his boot. Then he resumed his walk, meeting only a lone farmer driving a mule-drawn cart, nodding pleasantly. In twenty minutes he could see a church spire poking over the firs.

Winterlingen turned out to be an enchanting village nestled among rolling, fir-covered Black Forest slopes, containing a tiny bit of green in the square called Keinath's Park, a *Bierstube*, a small inn, a cobbler's shop and several dozen neat, half-timbered houses climbing the gentle rise behind the church.

Thirsty from his hike, Silverthorne entered the wood-paneled taproom. The malty, heavy-bodied stein of *Dunkelbier* served by a taciturn barman exceeded his expectations. Aside from a silent group of eldsters clustered around a card game at the rearmost table, he and the bartender were alone.

"Ah-h-h! That's what I needed." Silverthorne ordered another. "Do you by chance have a map of the area, my friend? High time I found out just where I'm headed."

The barman left off polishing glassware. He rummaged under the counter, unrolling a dog-eared sheet of parchment and slapping it flat on top of the bar. "Winterlingen is . . . here." He made change for Silverthorne's *Reichsmark* without further comment.

Um, he was north and west of the Danube. Stuttgart, the closest major city, was perhaps fifty kilometers to the north while Berlin lay over six hundred kilometers northeast. He could either work his way east to Munich, then head due north, or strike for Stuttgart—probably the more direct route. "Tell me, sir, does the road lead from here to Stuttgart?"

The barman shrugged. "*Ja*, from Hechingen it does. Walk to Tailfingen and take the path over the hills to Hechingen. That is the simplest."

He passed through a slightly larger village called Ebingen but did not stop. By the time he reached Tailfingen, the sun had all but disappeared behind forested hills and ominous saffron clouds were gathering to produce a ruddy sunset glow in the west.

He found shelter before the rain came, allowing a cloddish innkeeper to persuade him that the best food and softest beds in all *Baden-Württemberg* were to be found under his roof. The "veal," flat and unseasoned, was served with

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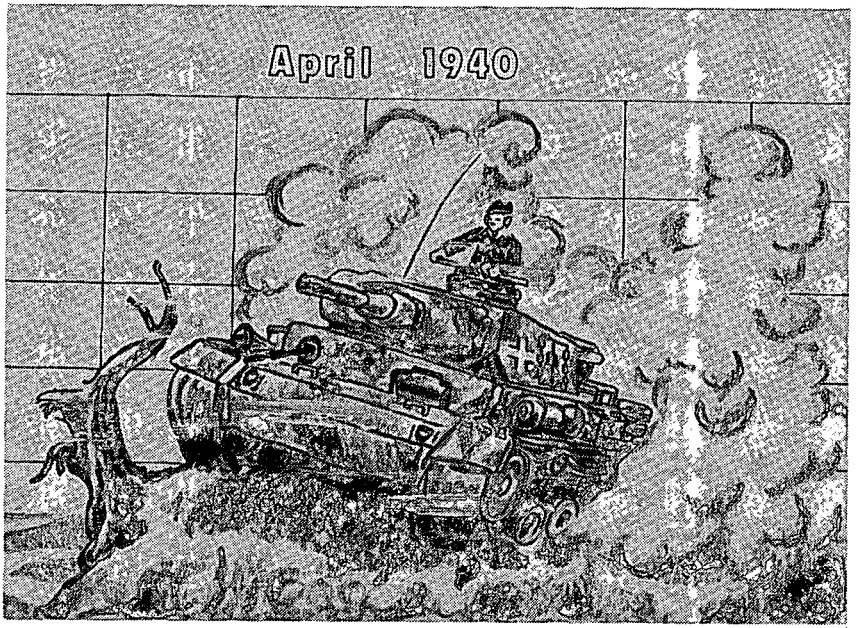

tiny dumplings called *Spaetzele* and with a broad wink and a nod. The "veal" was obviously venison; some unwary stag had wandered too near the inn.

Silverthorne washed down his meal with two more steins of delicious beer, then sought his room at once, gratefully crawling into the puffy, down-filled mattress. He pulled the comforter around his chin, listening in drowsy contentment to rain drip from the eaves.

He had intended to buy a local newspaper but thoughts of trying to read it, bone-tired as he was, made him abandon the notion. Large Gothic numerals on the dining-room calendar had been enough to make his heart pound in his chest.

Today was April 12, 1940. If anything he had ever been allowed to learn of 'history' were true, the war machine of Nazi Germany had just fallen on defenseless Denmark and Norway.

* * *

Stuttgart, Aalen and northwest into Bavaria through Ansbach to Nuremberg.

He slept beneath roadside trees after that first, luxurious night and either hitched rides or simply walked the lightly trafficked country roads. A talkative truck driver bent his ear for thirty kilimeters, then bought him lunch in Bayreuth, insisting that the "war" which so

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frightened everyone would blow over in a matter of months. Hadn't there been a "war" since last September? *Ja,* and what had mighty England and France done after their impetuous declarations of war? Absolutely nothing! They were sitting behind the silly Maginot fortifications, sweating little green apples because the *Wehrmacht* now occupied the Czech, Polish and Scandinavian strategic points after having had the sand to take back what rightfully belonged to Germany in the first place—the *Sudetenland.*

Silverthorne proved such an attentive listener that the truck driver invited him to wait while he ran an errand—an errand of the flesh as reported later in lurid detail—then met him faithfully and carried him all the way to Leipzig, where General von Falkenhurst shared the front pages with Admiral Raeder and the triumph of *Weserübung,* the High Command's code name for the Norwegian blitz.

"Your papers, *bitte*?"

Silverthorne stumbled to a halt. He had been walking through a small town somewhere in Brandenburg, ambling along lost in thought. He had not seen the policeman until the fellow was almost upon him. "*Natürlich, mein Herr.*" He remembered to smile.

The *Schupo* was young, with pinched, arrogant features. Silverthorne carefully allowed him to glimpse his wad of *Reichsmarks.*

"And how are things in Salzburg, *Herr* Steyr?"

"I'll find out next week. My holiday is almost over."

"Um." The policeman handed back his papers and strolled away. Apparently he had thought Silverthorne a vagrant. The incident, his first bad moment, made him realize that *Lederhosen* and a rucksack—while appropriate for the wilds of southern Germany—would certainly never do in Berlin.

He stopped in Wittenberg to sort through heaps of discards in a second-hand clothing store, emerging in a worn but not-yet-threadbare gray pin-striped suit and rundown-at-the-heels black shoes.

On April 19th, filled with nostalgia, Silverthorne stood once again beneath *Brandenburger Tör,* gazing wistfully down *Unter den Linden.* In the mid-18th century, Frederick the Great's heyday, Berlin's main street had been lined six rows deep in magnificent old lindens. Now there were but four rows of puny, two- or three-year-old trees, planted, he later learned, during construction of a subway running beneath the thoroughfare.

Overwhelmed by the city, he skipped lunch and went wandering, finding the streets still village-like, still devoted more to the use of bicycles than automobiles. A few *Pferde Droschken* lingered here and there—holdovers from another era. Far fewer uniforms were to be seen than he would have anticipated considering the wartime status of the

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capital. White-jacketed traffic policemen controlled vehicular flow with Prussian dignity, while now and then the red collar tabs and *feldgrau* of a *Wehrmacht* officer caught his eye. He stopped in *Friederichstrasse* to watch a dozen Hitler Youth troop past. The boys wore short black trousers, brown shirts and black neckerchiefs slipped through braided leather holders.

He sat on a bench for an hour, resting, and decided to accept Omsley's advice about atemporizing thoroughly. Feeling "at home" in a foreign era was vital; remaining a stranger would only heighten his chance of making some irreversible error.

Then, too impatient to worry further about atemporizing, he hurried off in another fit of sightseeing, strolling down the center mall of *Unter den Linden* to find that Frederick's old armory, the *Zeughaus*, had been transformed into a military hall of fame. Intrigued, he inspected suits of 16th-century armor, the death mask of von Hindenberg, hundreds of military uniforms, the hat Napoleon had worn on the Waterloo battlefield.

All Berlin had changed. Frederick's parade ground was now occupied by the busy acreage of Tempelhof Aerodrome; the red brick mass of Town Hall had been scrubbed of accumulated grime; many open fields and woodlands he vividly remembered from Frederick's time—mostly in western sectors of the city—were now a maze of concrete streets and buildings.

Ravenous, he treated himself to dinner that evening in a popular restaurant featuring twelve halls, each with its own distinctive theme and decor; Sunny Spain, the American Wild West, the Rhineland and so on. He chose the Bavarian Alps, watching a thunderstorm rake *Zugspitze,* Germany's highest peak, while his *Rouladen* lay neglected on the plate. It was quite realistic; thunder crashed and simulated rain drummed on the roof. Then the sun broke through and a yodeler strolled about, comforting the survivors.

At dusk he managed to rent a cheerless attic room from a grumpy widow who lived across the Oberbaum Bridge. The room was claustrophobic, smelled of mildew and was bleakly furnished, but all he wanted was a place to sleep. Transportation in Berlin, 1940, would have done credit to many cities in later eras. A single ticket entitled the holder to transfer at will from subway to surface to elevated in whatever combination he chose. And after his first visit to one, Silverthorne decided to use Berlin's postal substations as his "office" since even their branches offered well-lighted public writing rooms with inkpots, blotters and—wonder of wonders!—pens that *wrote*.

The next day, April 20th, he joined thousand of Berliners congregated along *Charlottenburger Chaussee* in the wooded *Tiergarten*

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to watch Adolf Hitler's birthday parade. The crowd was congenial, enjoying an excited holiday mood. Many individuals had equipped themselves with crude periscopes fashioned from two hand mirrors affixed to a cardboard mailing tube. People stood patiently as the procession of antiquated horse-drawn caissons rumbled past. A few armored cars were interspersed between marching, field-equipped regiments, most *Panzers* and other modern weapons being engaged in far more important business elsewhere.

Finally, behind an enormous military band trumpeting the anthem, wheeled a huge Mercedes tourer bearing the 20th century's most reviled despot. Surrounded by black-clad *SS* elite, Goebbels sat beside him, smiling ferret-like, sharing The Leader's glory.

An electric fluid filled the air as Hitler's entourage swept by. Silverthorne couldn't tear his eyes away; the scene was straight from one of the stark black-and-white films he had been forced to view *ad nauseum* in school, and it provoked the same reaction within him—revulsion combined with a twinge of disbelief. It was incredible that the smug, stereotyped face beneath the billed cap, riding past Silverthorne's vantage point, appearing no larger than one's little fingernail, had been able to place its mark so indelibly upon mankind.

Eyes watering, emotions churning, Silverthorne turned away. He edged toward the fringes of the crowd, struck by the hopelessness of his situation. The elation he had experienced upon arriving in Berlin was gone. What could one lonely man do to thwart the purpose and might surrounding him in Germany's young *Reich*? Omsley's words rang in his mind: *Lustmann's venture was successful. It it can be done once, it can be done again.*

No reason why it can't, Bernard. No reason, except . . . .

Silverthorne reprimanded himself for defeatism. He had arrived in Berlin less than two days ago, not long enough to even begin atemporizing. Barring a major miracle, it would take much, much longer to get a whiff of Lustmann's trail. It was one helluva conceit to expect miracles—major, minor or incidental.

How could he hope to locate Franz Lustmann in a thriving metropolis of four million? He prowled among the trees, overcome by a dark mood, until a sudden thought occurred to him: If he himself had wanted a glimpse of Hitler today, might not Lustmann also be somewhere here in *Tiergarten*?

Silverthorne quickened his pace. The crowd was dispersing, gabbling about how triumphant *Der Führer* had looked, how gracious he had been in accepting a nosegay from tiny blonde twin girls before the parade, how the war would soon be over and things would return to

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normal. He searched their faces, ploughing back and forth along the thoroughfare, once hurrying after a tall man who might have been Lustmann, catching up with him to discover a puffing, red-faced eldster who probably walked his four kilometers religiously each day to keep fit.

When the crowd thinned, he turned discouraged steps toward the Kroll, a fashionable outdoor restaurant in *Tiergarten* now doing a land-office business in the parade's wake. He circulated around the edges of the terrace for fifteen minutes. Franz Lustmann was not there.

Crestfallen, Silverthorne walked about for the remainder of the afternoon, inspecting the elephants at the zoo, lunching at a sidewalk café, getting drenched by an unexpected shower. He ended his tour on the Oberbaum Bridge, staring down into the Spree's turgid waters until twilight's chill forced him to climb the creaking stair to his cheerless room.

With sudden resolve he switched on the naked bulb, found a pencil and a scrap of wrapping paper and began listing everything he had ever learned about this quarry.

* * *

The hero had been young for his mission when Erich Lebe's fanatic team dispatched him in 1974—only twenty-eight or thereabouts—which meant that Silverthorne would be searching for someone ten real-time years his junior. Bombastic propagãnda eulogies had characterized Lustmann as a physicist, a dedicated scientist who had aided and abetted the perfecting of Lebe's original temporal-transition device. Silverthorne suspected that Lustmann was actually more con man than "physicist." The sleek, egotistical gloss of the *Reichsheld,* pictured in every sort of tribute imaginable, bespoke high intelligence, high resolution and an even higher degree of self-satisfaction.

Rumor had it that Lustmann also dabbled in the occult sciences. His official career, after a celebrated return to a world Germany ruled with dazzling thoroughness, had been a checkered affair: four marriages, an international scandal involving a ballerina in Kharkov *Gauleitung* (officialese had never been able to completely squelch that one) and a dozen dismal dips and rocketing ascents in and out of Party favor, largely because of his lifelong indifference to politics as such. Franz Lustmann had considered himself above mundane matters because of his single heroic escapade.

And his lifestyle had proved his undoing. The underground movement to which Silverthorne belonged had learned that Lustmann's widely mourned death in 2004 had not really been caused by a stroke. The hero had drunk himself to death, all the while conducting séances for affluent dowagers

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reading horoscopes and wenching limitlessly—a demise quite unlike that of any other "physicist."

Which led Silverthorne back to the ever-present enigma: How had Lustmann, alone and friendless, managed to contact the Nazi hierarchy and make his prescient knowledge felt? How had he changed history—the actual mechanics of it? Silverthorne had heard this question debated endlessly; everyone had his pet theory. There was, for instance, the Martin Borman hypothesis that the mysterious, little-known Borman, who had taken Hess's place as number-two man in Hitler's inner circle, was actually Franz Lustmann. The other theories he had heard struck Silverthorne as equally absurd.

He undressed quickly in the chilled room and leaped into bed, staring for a long time at the dim ceiling. It did not matter, really, what method Lustmann had used. Finding the man would solve it all. Finding . . . Lustmann . . . .

Awaking refreshed and filled with new energy, he stopped at a bookseller's shop in *Alexander Platz* and bought a guidebook entitled *BERLIN VON A BIS Z*. Each night thereafter, on a sheet of wrapping paper he plotted every major and minor bistro, opera house, theatre, bordello and movie house he could discover either by reference to the guidebook or through scouring Berlin neighborhood by neighborhood. Making his rounds, searching for that unmistakable face in the crowds and reading about the "war" in the newspapers occupied his days. He lived Spartanly, knowing that his current rate of expenditure would exhaust the cash in about one month. The jewelry was a last resort.

Omsley would have been proud of the way he was atemporizing. He found himself using the rich, racy argot of Berlin's streets with natural ease. Money was "wire," "moss," "gravel" or "powder." *Reichsmarks* were called "*Eier*"—eggs—or "*Emmchen*, a diminutive of the letter "M." The best tutors by far were the salty-tongued flower women of *Leipziger Strasser*. Silverthorne handled the blooms disapprovingly, commenting on their withered appearance despite their excessive cost. The fluent dressing-down he received taught him a great deal about the niceties of slanderous abuse.

He spent many evenings at *Staats Oper*, arriving a full hour before the performance to watch for Lustmann among early comers, buying a standing-room ticket, spending the intermissions prowling about the lobby, then watching again as the opera house emptied. He enjoyed *Freischutz*, reveled in the contrapuntal magnificence of *Meistersinger*, almost developed fallen arches during the interminable vocal dialogue of *Parsifal* and endured a rather indifferent production of *Zauberflaute*, concluding that

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Lustmann was not attending the opera.

He next tried sporting events, concerts and even one Nazi rally, with equally disappointing results. The dread notion that Lustmann had not yet arrived in Berlin cropped up increasingly, bringing on periods of gloomy depression. He resolutely pushed the thought away. Nothing in the present course of events seemed any whit different from the official history of World War II he had studied in school.

Silverthorne played endless suppositional games. He put himself in Lustmann's place, imagining where he would stay, what he might do to occupy his time. Why, there was no real difference between Lustmann and himself. Both were interlopers, strangers in a strange land. But the man *had* to be here. Lebe would certainly have wanted his man on the scene when hostilities erupted. It would be best, perhaps, if he just took Lustmann's presence for granted; that would make finding him a simple matter of perseverance, of never giving up.

At the end of the first week in May a despondent James Silverthorne was consulting his guidebook in a postal sub-station writing room near the Berlin Zoo. He glanced up as a tall man entered, then looked away quickly, forgetting to breathe.

When he dared look again, the man had seated himself in a cane-backed chair. Hand propped to forehead, he was busily addressing an envelope.

Was it Lustmann? Silverthorne was not certain. He rose silently, passing behind the tall man on his way to the door. A hasty glance gave him the impression of florid German cursive written in green ink. He fled the postal sub-station, having no intention of allowing his suspected quarry a look at his face.

Silverthorne hurried to the end of the block, crossed with the light and came back abreast of the postal station's entrance. He folded his arms across his chest to calm the trembling.

The instant the angular, rather spare figure wearing a well-tailored camels-hair topcoat appeared in the doorway, all of Silverthorne's doubt vanished. The aquiline nose, rather prognathous jaw and dirty-blond hair firmed his conviction.

Heart pounding, he began to trail Lustmann, stopping once while the man paused to light a cigarette and survey the few pedestrians walking behind him. A very cautious man, Lustmann, Silverthorne could not imagine why he was concerned about being followed.

Lustmann led him several blocks on foot before opening a bright red letterbox—one of five thousand or so in Berlin proper—and posting an envelope. Noting the cross streets, Silverthorne continued his discreet shadowing.

They turned into *Unter den Linden*. Surprisingly Lustmann crossed the boulevard and mounted the steps

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of the swank Hotel Adlon. Why not? A gentleman of Lustmann's sensibilities could not be expected to stay just anywhere.

Picking his way across the swastika-bannered thoroughfare, Silverthorne paused behind a parked car. Yes, there was cautious, careful Franz Lustmann peering from a lobby window.

When the tall man finally quit the window, Silverthorne ran up the steps and pushed his way through the glass door, sitting down on a leather settee behind a marble pillar and feeling rather out of place in the sumptuous lobby. Lustmann was at the desk. A clerk reached up and took a key from the pegboard, passing it over to him with a smile.

Silverthorne waited until the lift doors closed behind Lustmann, then sauntered past the desk. The clerk was now sorting mail and since it was shortly after the luncheon hour, most guests would surely be out. Only three empty pegs remained in the uppermost row; two on the left but only one on the right where the clerk had taken down Lustmann's key.

Silverthorne left the Hotel Adlon walking on air. Franz Lustmann was a guest in room 612. The long odds against Silverthorne's chances for success were diminishing rapidly. He retraced his steps toward the mailbox where his quarry had posted the letter. Mail pick-ups were made four times daily during the week. Silverthorne walked fast.

When he rounded the corner, he saw that a postman was reaching out to unlock the letterbox. The man looked startled to see someone dash up to him, heavily out of breath.

"Pardon me . . . sir. Just this moment I posted a letter and I . . . think it was incorrectly addressed. Would it be too much to ask . . . may I check the address?"

The postman squinted suspiciously. "That's most irregular, sir. I'd lose my job if I allowed anyone to tamper with—"

"No, no!" Silverthorne said quickly. "I won't even touch the letter. I only want to make certain the street number is correct. It's written in . . . green ink. You can't miss it." Silverthorne folded a *Reichsmark* note in the palm of his hand.

The postman blinked, then made it disappear. "I suppose we can do that much for a regular customer," he said pleasantly. "Green ink . . . . Oh! Can this be it, *mein Herr?*"

Silverthorne locked the address in his mind. "My friend," he said in a disguested tone, "I've bothered you for nothing. The address is exactly as it should be."

The postman shrugged. "Then everyone's happy, no?"

"Everyone. Be sure to have a few beers on your way home from work and forget your troubles. *Vielen dank*!"

"Any time."

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He headed for the nearest bus stop. The letter had been addressed to one Zoltan—no last name—at a street number somewhere in the Wilmersdorf district. It probably meant nothing but he intended to check it out nevertheless.

* * *

Silverthorne got off the buss and walked five blocks through an unfashionable section of Wilversdorf. The buildings and streets looked indefinably seedy, as though frequented by less-than-affluent citizens. He passed a delicatessen whose boarded shop windows partially concealed shattered glass. A crude Star of David daubed on the padlocked door told a mute story.

He spotted Zoltan's sign upon turning the corner at the end of the block, chuckling in self-deprecation. The Great Zoltan, it seemed, was a "world-famous" astrologer.

His establishment's sign was festooned with zodiacal arcana and capped with a mystical Persian Eye. Lustmann's letter had sent him chasing rainbows. The "physicist" was undoubtedly even here following his preoccupation with the occult, amusing himself with horoscopes and such nonsense. Good! It meant he would have less time to devote to his mission.

He continued past Zoltan's place out of curiosity. The window was opaqued. A poster featuring a bearded, turbaned man who glared at the world with hostile intensity was bounded by a catch-phrase almost lost in a forest of exclamation points: "! ! ! ! ! THE ANCIENT ART CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE ! ! ! ! !"

Bemused and disappointed, he caught a bus back to *Unter den Linden* where he stood across from the Hotel Adlon for several hours, reading *Völkischer Beobachter* while covertly scanning the hotel's steps. At eight-thirty he gave up and went to his lonely room to think. It had been a productive day; he was happily weary.

But something nibbled at his subconscious all evening, something just beyond range of his mind's peripheral vision. Whatever it was, he could not seem to focus on it or bring it to the surface. He went to bed early to escape the chill and lay staring into the darkness, revolving strategies, examining theories, suspecting this, discarding that.

Sometime in the wee hours he awoke with a start, crying, ". . . or History!" Leaving the bed in a single bound, Silverthorne began to pace the frigid room, smashing fist into open palm, uttering short, benedictive profanities in four languages.

It fit! By God, it fit! "The Ancient Art can Change your Life," he muttered. Could Lustmann have actually . . . ?

No, no. It was all too damned farfetched. Or was it? For some reason, he knew he had found the answer, unbelievable though it might

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be: Lustmann was actually playing the role of *seer* in carrying out Erich Lebe's fantastic scheme to alter the course of history!

Unable to sleep, Silverthorne watched the dawn that morning—a gloomy gray light seeping through heavy clouds—before once again taking up his post outside the Hotel Adlon.

Twice he shifted to the center mall of *Unter den Linden* and then to spots farther down the avenue. It would never do for the suspicious Lustmann to tag him as a loiterer. At one o'clock, having learned every word of the May 8th *Beobachter* by rote, he gave up and had a skimpy lunch. His money was draining away at an alarming rate; he would have to pinch every *Pfennig* from now on.

The morning's unproductive vigil left him with a sour taste in his mouth. He had hoped to tail Lustmann and find a connecting link between reality and the outrageous "false prophet" conjecture that yesterday's letter had generated.

But the "physicist" seemed to be sticking close to his room. Silverthorne decided, after arguing the matter with himself, to reconnoiter the Great Zoltan's astrology parlor—and to be damned careful how he went about it.

He strolled about for an hour, then returned to his room and spruced himself up, combing his hair, which badly needed trimming, and rubbing the worst scuff marks from the second-hand shoes.

He got off the bus in Wilversdorf and found a pawnshop, where he haggled over a pair of diamond earrings from the handful of jewelry he had carried into the past, amazed to receive one-third more than his estimate of their worth.

Feeling better with money in his pocket once again, he walked the four blocks to Zoltan's place, finding a glistening black Mercedes sedan drawn up at the curb. The auto was conspicuous, utterly out of place on the sleazy street. He walked past it to the corner and then turned. The Mercedes had a polished, military aspect about it, although the license tab was civilian.

He returned speculatively and paused. Zoltan's door had no bell. He inched it open—it moved easily, silently—until he could slip through into a reception room hung with musty-smelling red draperies. A crystal ball, like a giant's teardrop, lay on a badly marred walnut desk. A fearsome poster of the Great Zoltan plying his art leered insolently from the wall.

Silverthorne closed the door with painstaking care. Low voices were filtering toward him from beyond the draped doorway that led to the rear of the shop. He stood deadstill, listening.

"—and you yourself did not *read* the letter, I suppose?" The testy voice was laden with sarcasm.

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"I . . . no, no! It came in yesterday's four o'clock post, *mein Herr*. I called your office immediately, just as I have always done." Silverthorne made note of the accent—Hungarian, or possibly Romanian.

"Patience, Kurt," advised a more cultured voice. "*Herr* Zoltan has been most cooperative. I'm certain he will continue to be. Won't you, *Herr* Zoltan?"

"Oh, but naturally, sir."

"There, you see, Kurt? The reason I've come personally to talk with you today, *Herr* Zoltan, is that this madness has gotten completely out of hand. When whoever signs himself 'A Friend of the *Reich*' first began his astounding predictions, everyone considered him a mere crank, nothing more.

"But when he precisely defined the terms of the Munich Pact—even before Prime Minister Chamberlain flew to *Berchtesgaden*—foretold our co-existence treaty with the USSR and the spineless antics of the British and French when we liberated the *Sudetenland*, annexed Austria, and liberated Czechoslovakia, the *Führer* himself became a devoted admirer. In fact, I once chanced to be in his presence when he remarked that 'great minds think alike.' Amusing, *Herr* Zoltan? Or don't you think so?"

"Star-gazing nonsense!" said the one called Kurt.

After a short, weighty silence, the smooth voice continued. "That may or may not be the case; we

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shall see. An any rate, *Herr* Zoltan, this 'Friend of the *Reich*' is beginning to have an unsettling effect upon the very foreign policy of our state. Indeed, Nostradamus pales beside such monumental prophecies. Our 'friend' predicted the lull beginning last fall, explaining that the Franco-British alliance would 'project various offensive schemes it lacked the muscle to execute.' He *accurately* named names and *Wehrmacht* deployments to the regimental level—their then-current positions.

"He told us, and I quote: 'Germany will not attack Belgium in November, nineteen thirty-nine, as planned, greatly disappointing The Leader, but will wait propitiously until spring, nineteen forty, then strike where a strike is least expected.' Last month, *Herr* Zoltan, Norway fell."

"*Ausserördentlich*!"

"Actually that is something of an understatement. It is uncanny, crossing all boundaries of mere fortune-telling. The man has been *one thousand per cent correct* in his predictions."

The sound of labored breathing emanated from beyond the curtained doorway. James Silverthorne listened, entranced.

"No, do not be afraid," the silken voice went on. "I plan to make you privy to the contents of yesterday's letter in the interest of learning more about this 'great art' of yours, Herr Zoltan. But do not let your tongue become careless. Should you disclose a single syllable of what I am about to tell you, we will have your skin taken off one square centimeter at a time. Understood?"

An appealing, blubbering sound formed Zoltan's assurance.

"Excellent, Herr Zoltan! That's settled. Now I shall skip the usual gibberish, if gibberish it be, concerning Saturn being in the Sun's second house and so forth. You may pretend to understand all of that nattering if you wish. I do not.

"Let's see . . . ah, here we are: 'In the early hours of May tenth, Army Group 'B,' namely von Küchler's Eighteenth Army, striking quickly across the Peel Line, will push Winkelman's Army of the Netherlands back to the Dyle Line, while von Reichenau's Sixth Army advances across the Belgian frontier with huge success. Von Leeb's Army Group 'C' will feint an attack on the Maginot defenses, pinning down over forty French divisions, which will allow von Rundstedt's Army Group 'A,' led by General Guderian's seven armored division, to crash through the forest of the Ardennes.'

"There! I'm unable to enlighten you as to the accuracy or inaccuracy of all this, *Herr* Zoltan, both because of national security and because of the fact that it hasn't yet happened. May tenth is but day after tomorrow and we shall see what we shall see. But I simply

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must tell you—please remember your skin—that General von Manstein, Rundstedt's chief of staff, has made a constant nuisance of himself advocating a totally unorthodox strike through the hilly, wooded Ardennes Forest ever since last fall.

"Hear me, Zoltan! This is absolute magic! *No one* who failed to attend OKW staff conferences could possibly have learned about Manstein's tactical master-stroke. Not possibly!

"Now then," continued the smooth voice, growing a shade more insistent, "what we must learn is this: Is it at all conceivable—not probable, mine you, merely conceivable—that the, er, 'science' of astrology would permit such refined, definitive and uncannily accurate predictions?"

After a wheezing sigh that bubbled with terror, Zoltan said, "This . . . man, whoever he is, lays claim to possession of certain ancient Greek manuscripts that permit a purer, less corrupted method of allowing the stars to reveal themselves to—"

"No, no, Zoltan. I asked for no lecture on arcana. Give me a simple 'yes, or a simple 'no.' Can it be done?"

"I . . . do not believe so, sir. I cannot imagine how such . . . detail or accuracy could possibly be obtained."

"Nor I, Zoltan," said the other. "Nor I. We must run this charlatan to the ground, mustn't we? It's dangerous and disturbing to have a mind-reader like this 'Friend of the *Reich*' about, especially when the *Führer* finds himself more and more inclined to await the arrival of his next letter before making a decision vital to us all. *Herr* Himmler and I have become quite concerned . . . ."

Standing perfectly still for so long, Silverthorne's leg had cramped. He shifted his weight to massage it and a board creaked noisily in the floor. He whirled, dry-mouthed, and grasped the knob, pulling open the door and slamming it. "*Guten Tag*?" he called hopefully.

Concerted whispering went on behind the draperies. An ashen-faced, perspiring man who looked ten years older than the Zoltan in the posters emerged hesitantly. "Yes?"

" *'S tut sehr gleich, Herff Zoltan.* Wonder if I might arrange for a personal reading this afternoon? You see, I'm a Sagittarius. I'm faced with a vital business dealing and—"

"I'm sorry, sir. Another time perhaps." Zoltan wiped his forehead with his sleeve. "I'm not . . . feeling myself today."

"Oh?" Silverthorne frowned. "I'm distressed to hear it, of course. Might I try tomorrow, sir? It's *very* important to me."

"Tomorrow will be fine. Come at two. Please excuse me now."

"I'll be prompt," said Silver-

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thorne, closing the door behind him. He walked toward the bus stop, feeling twelve feet tall. He had managed to learn the "what" of it. All that remained was devising a feasible "how."

* * *

Lustmann did not leave his sanctuary all next day. Silverthorne began to feel like one of *Unter den Linden's* landmarks.

He prowled about the streets near the Hotel Adlon in a nervouse frame of mind. Tomorrow was May 10th. Should the prediction he had overhead prove valid—and he had every reason to know it would—the German offensive in Europe would begin.

It was frustrating to realize what had to be done at the same time Lustmann was holed up like a fox in his lair. He had planned to wait until the man left his room, then have a go at breaking in and . . . .

And what? He drifted to his favorite think-spot on the Oberbaum Bridge, acknowledging with dismay that he had never carried his intentions beyond the point of breaking into Lustmann's room. He revolved tentative notions until well after sunset. There seemed to be no practical way to intercept Lustmann's apocryphal letters and make changes in them—an action that appealed to him as the nicest, most subtle method of achieving his purpose. The Nazi leadership had no idea of who Lustmann was—no idea he even existed—nor the slightest inkling of his motives. Nor would they—ever. Silverthorne spent a moment or two admiring Lustmann's unorthodox means of gaining Hitler's ear, coinciding as it did with the *Führer's* well-advertised mystic concept of "Nordic destiny."

With a resigned grimace he spat into the Spree, having at last faced the issue squarely. The only answer was the obvious one: He would have to take Franz Lustmann's place.

The remaining question was whether James Silverthorne, erstwhile professor of history, who had never killed anything higher in the chain of life than the elk he had bagged with his longbow in the summer of 2071, could muster the courage and resourcefulness to do what must now be done.

Only a few *Reichsmarks* remained in his wallet. Despite that, he purchased a small bottle of *Schnapps* and took it back to his dreary room, deciding to wait until the dinner hour when the hotel lobby would be comfortably crowded. Not too much *Schnapps,* he warned himself. He wanted only enough to make him relaxed and glib-tongued. This would be the toughest night of his life. Perhaps the last.

A little after eight o'clock he phoned the hotel desk from a convenience booth around the corner,

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asking for room 612. The phone jangled twice before someone said, "Hello?"

Silverthorne almost panicked and hung up; the voice at the other end was feminine. "*Guten Abend;*" he said cautiously. "May I speak to the gentleman there in 612?"

"Sure," said the girl, "I'll call him, though he's *no* gentlemen, believe me."

Silverthorne could hear muffled voices. At last a petulant male voice said, "Yes?"

"*Herr* Lustmann?"

There was the faintest intake of breath. "I . . . think you must have the wrong number."

"I beg you, don't hang up, *Herr* Lustmann. I must see you immediately. You are in grave danger."

"Danger? What nonsense!"

"You *must* believe me, sir."

After a short pause, Lustmann said, "You are either a practical jokester or a madman. Bother me again and I shall call the police. You may be assured of it."

"Please listen," Silverthorne pleaded earnestly. "I'm not an informer. I'll be only to happy to explain when we're face to face. Have the lady go, if you will. I'll be at your door in precisely ten minutes."

"Who *are* you?"

Silverthorne moistened his lips. "I was born February ninth, two thousant thirty-seven," he said. "I can't say more over the phone, sir. I'll come in ten minutes. It will be greatly to your advantage to keep the appointment."

He cradled the phone and walked twice around the block to quiet his jumpiness and to allow Lustmann an opportunity to rid himself of the girl. So that was why the "physicist" never went out. Between his prophecies, stars and chippies, he had little reason to leave the Hotel Adlon.

Silverthorne entered the hotel behind a chattering group of *Bummelners* headed for the bar. He drifted inconspicuously through the maze of pillars, leather settees and potted palms to the stairwell, meeting no one as he trudged upward to the sixth floor.

The door to 612 was ajar. He knocked softly and the door swung wide to reveal a tastefully furnished parlor. No one was in sight but instinct told him that Lustmann was standing behind the door.

Placing both hands in front of him, Silverthorne stepped across the threshold. Franz Lustmann kneed the door shut and locked it without taking his eyes from Silverthorne. A Walther automatic pistol was in his fist. "Well, *Herr* Twenty Thirty-seven, this had better be damned good!"

Staring into Lustmann's patrician features as though fascinated, Silverthorne said, "I . . . can't tell you what an honor this is for me, sir. I sincerely wish there were time for us—"

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"Out with it! Who the devil are you? What do you want?"

Silverthorne clicked his heels, tipping his head. "Allow me to introduce myself, sir. Steyr, a minor cog in the Temporal Security Agency of *Deutsches Weltanreich*."

"*Weltan* . . . ." A look of amazement crept over Lustmann's florid features. The Walther automatic sagged in his grip. "Then . . . I will *succeed*?"

"Most gloriously, sir. You will not only succeed in your holy mission but when you return to nineteen seventy-four in triumph, you will find yourself second only to the *Führer's* memory, and to Erich Lebe himself, in the world's esteem. *Our* world's esteem."

"But, Steyr, this is marvelous!"

"You must hurry now," warned Silverthorne. "Your letter to Zoltan day before yesterday has Himmler's people running in circles. They've managed to trace you to the postal station where you addressed the letter—the station near the zoo. They could be here at any instant."

Lustmann's eyes widened. The last vestiges of suspicion vanished and he slipped the Walther into a shoulder hoster, taking Silverthorne's arm with unwonted familiarity. "Yes, yes. I'll pack at once, Styr. Will you take me to a safer place?"

Silverthorne moved his head solemnly from side to side. "Unfortunately, that is impossible for I cannot leave. When they come, a scapegoat must be present. I've been . . . well trained."

Lustmann stared at him, open-mouthed. "By God, I daresay you have, Steyr! Help me with the suitcases there in the bedroom."

"*Jawohl, Herr* Lustmann." He followed the other, eyes darting from one item of furnishing to another. There was a heavy ceramic lamp on the endtable beside the divan that might do, or even the small chiming clock on the mantelpiece. Either would make a satisfactory, though cumbersome, cudgel. He would search for something easier to handle.

"What sort of tale will you tell them?" asked Lustmann, flinging open a suitcase on the bed.

"I've been drilled in the astrological sciences, sir. I must appear to be a crank, a false lead. Your next prediction will convince them they've apprehended the wrong man."

"I . . . see. But you realize what will happen . . ."

"Do not concern yourself with me, sir. I wear a false tooth that can be used if it becomes necessary. The Temporal Security Agency is most thorough."

Lustmann grunted. "Thorough isn't the word for it! Amazing! Tell me, are you alone in Berlin?"

"No, sir. Four of us are presently covering you. If your telephone rings twice, then stops, you must leave immediately by way of the fire escape. It would be prudent to

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gather your money and other indispensables together in the event they arrive before you finish packing.''

Silverthorne had found a reasonable weapon in the closet—a metal-framed oaken shoetree. He removed it from a tan-and-white wingtip brogue, setting it to one side.

''An excellent idea! Pack these clothes, Steyr, while I collect the other things.''

''Yes, sir.'' Silverthorne slipped the shoetree into his jacket pocket where it would be concealed by the clothing he was carrying to the bed. The tall man brought a chair from the vanity, standing on it to reach the closet's high shelf.

''What is it like, the future?'' asked Lustmann without turning around. ''I've speculated endlessly about what the world will be a century from now.'' There was an excited intensity in the question.

Watching for his chance, Silverthorne replied, ''It's simply our world, *Herr* Lustmann, thanks to yourself and *Herr Doktor* Lebe.''

Lustmann nodded, handing down a pair of leather-covered notebooks and a metal strongbox. ''You have seen Berlin, I take it?''

''Twice, sir. I was there for the Games in two thousand sixty-six. Speer Stadium holds a quarter-million people. It's larger than the stadium in Nuremberg. The city is more lovely, even, than Paris—wide tree-lined boulevards with the Great Hall, Goering's Palace and Adolf Hitler's Tomb dominating the skyline.''

''Fascinating!'' His headshake incredulous, Lustmann turned full attention back to the closet.

Silverthorne lifted one foot to the bed. He rose silently, balancing himself, and drew out the shoetree. Then he sapped Lustmann a roundhouse blow behind the left ear.

The tall man grunted loudly. He toppled off the chair, clawing desperately at rows of neatly hung suits and topcoats, groping blindly for the Walther.

In a frenzy Silverthorne leaped down and struck him again with all his might. And again! Lustmann twitched once, twice, then lay still.

Silverthorne sagged on the bed, his chest heaving in short, agonized gasps. ''Now . . . it may be *our* world,'' he choked. He took out a pen knife and cut a length of sash cord from the drawn venetial blinds. His hands were trembling almost uncontrollably.

He stood above the prone figure, his face beaded with perspiration, and remembered Bernard Omsley, Henderson, Powell, Graham and all of the other truncated lives that had let to this moment. He knelt and did what had to be done, then rushed into the bathroom where he was violently ill.

After Silverthorne had bathed his face in cold water, he made an exhaustive search of the entire suite. Lustmann's death must be made to look like the result of simple robbery.

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He took the man's wallet, pocketed the unbelievable amount of money he found in the unlocked strongbox and then examined the true treasures—leather-bound notebooks that contained a long typewritten account of the *authentic* war. He kept the automatic pistol, the other's cufflinks, rings, tie clasp and every scrap of identification he could locate.

One unsavory task remained. Lips compressed with distaste, he pried apart the corpse's jaws. Lustmann's teeth were firm and regular, with few fillings. Cursing subvocally, Silverthorne let go and wiped his fingers. What was he thinking of? Lustmann, returning to 1940 from the seventh decade of the 20th century, would certainly not be equipped with an ultra-microminiaturized temporal return network like his own.

He ripped open the dead man's shirt. There it was: a crude metal band encircling the chest. Silverthorne stripped off the shirt. He could not take the risk that a policeman or a coroner might accidently trigger the network, though thoughts of their amazement at a cadaver vanishing before their very eyes made his lips twitch in amusement. If Lustmann's body were to reappear in 1974, Erich Lebe would undoubtedly dispatch a replacement.

As he closed the suite's door after him, surprised at his own coolness, Silverthorne felt a glow of utter satisfaction. Lustmann's death had already affected the myriad flow of space-time events once leading to the Nazi tyranny hd had known all his life. He breezed down the stairs and out through the lobby unnoticed, the notebooks tucked casually under one arm, with money jammed into every jacket and trouser pocket.

The automatic pistol and temporal return network went into the Spree as he crossed the Oberbaum Bridge on the way to his room. A delayed reaction set in after he got there, but the *Schnapps* helped allay his agitation, his quaking hands. With a historian's insatiable curiosity, he delved into the notebooks at once, reading all through the night, forgetting food, feeling not the least bit sleepy until dawnlight filtered through the dirty window. He stretched and rubbed his burning eyes, then fell into bed.

At last he knew the actual history of World War II, first time around—England's miraculous salvage of her armies from the beach at Dunkirk; the *Luftwaffe* frustration during the Battle of Britain, the *Afrika Korps'* agony and sorry end, Germany's suicidal plunge into the vastnesses of European Russia, the sieges of Stalingrad and Leningrad, and the slow erosion of *Wehrmacht* effectiveness as supplies shrank and American arms production and waxing field strength made themselves felt on all fronts. Horrified, he learned of the conscienceless mur-

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Horrified, he learned of the conscienceless murder of millions of innocent Jews, Slavs, Gypsies and other non-combatant civilians, and he found that the demi-god Adolf Hitler had not died of cancer after all . . . .

He awoke at two o'clock in the afternoon and went out briefly for a bite to eat, then purchased a bottle of green ink and spent the remainder of the day doggedly learning to imitate Lustmann's florid penmanship—no simple task.

Bannerlines in next morning's *Beobachter* proclaimed the end of the "Twilight War." *Wehrmacht* legions had burst across the Dutch and Belgian frontiers with devastating suddenness.

On May 12th, the day General von Kleist crossed the French border, Silverthorne posted his first letter to Zoltan, predicting Guderian's armored thrust to Sedan—German infantry marching so swiftly that whole divisions reached the Meuse only days after the *Panzers*, crossing the river in the wake of saturation bombing by screaming *Stukas*. Then the sweep to the Channel Coast in mere days, outrunning the stunned, retreating British and French divisions that would be cut off and trapped in Belgium.

He also made a first tentative stab at redirection, intimating that Britain would "remain basically sympathetic to Germany's inevitable invasion of the USSR" only if treated with due respect, further implying that His Majesty's Goverment was already giving serious thought to relieving the thirteen divisions, soon to be isolated on the continent, by sea.

He told them boldly that the *Führer* alone had the wisdom and insight necessary to recognize the basic racial tie with England and that he would cannily halt Guderian's armor in time to allow Britain to save face—and her armies.

He posted the letter around four o'clock and went for a walk, stopping to read the paper over a beer. Then he headed back to his room, filled with gloomy premonitions about the Allied bombs soon to rain on Berlin.

Silverthorne unlocked the door. As he reached for the light switch, something hard smashed into his skull. There was a burst of brilliance as the floor surged upward and struck his cheek painfully.

As with the slow, underwater languidity of a dream, he felt brusque hands roll him over on his back. He groaned. The room was dark. He could see only a shadowy figure bending over him.

"I should kill you," muttered a thickly accented voice. "Much safer but . . . . Hell, I owe you too great a debt!"

Silverthorne's jaws were prized apart. He raised feeble hands to fend off the attacker but it was useless. Fingers closed over the false bicuspid, twisting sharply.

"Bon voyage, *Herr* Steyr!"

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The convulsive, visceral-crawling sensation of temporal transition was the last thing Silverthorne remembered.

* * *

He was semi-conscious for a time, sprawling on the all-too-familiar padding of the reception chamber in Carlsbad Caverns. He sat up stiffly, rubbing his aching head, and then he fought to his knees.

An alarm bell clanged in the distance. He could hear the approaching sound of running footsteps.

Silverthorne had managed to gain his feet, knees wobbly and weak, head swimming, when the guards appeared. He stared at their submachine guns and slowly raised his arms.

There were six of them—blockish, blank-faced oafs in baggy tan uniforms and jackboots. With a sinking feeling, Silverthorne noted the red stars on their billed caps.

A pudgy, sloppily dressed man of middle years pushed his way through the ring of guards. He regarded Silverthorne with unveiled skepticism and then said something in Russian. Silverthorne shrugged and shook his head.

"Don't tell me another Nazi time-traveler has dropped into our midst!" the man said in fair German. "Did the whole German nation think to escape into the future?"

Silverthorne said defensively, "I . . . I'm an American."

The man chortled. He turned to the guards, hooting, "*Americanski*!" The guards laughed in appreciation and the man said, "No, my friend; I'm afraid that won't wash. We've spent thousands of hours interrogating Nazi bunglers. We refuse to waste the time. We simply take them and stand them against the nearest convenient wall."

"But I *am* American," protested James Silverthorne. The pudgy man looked growwly insulted. "Ridiculous! There has been no such thing as 'American' for . . ."

He broke off and peered at Silverthorne more intently. "Steyr? Is your name Hans Steyr?"

"I . . . it's a name I once used but—"

"Your papers led us to believe you were Austrian."

"My real name—my American name—is Silverthorne."

"Hmm-m-, interesting." The other's brows lifted. "Let me apologize for disbelieving you. Welcome to the World Soviet, *Herr* Silverthorne. Yuri Komarov made mention of you in his book—how he spared your life in view of the tremendous, though unwitting, contribution you made to our cause. You're a much-discussed footnote to history. Our historical technicians have speculated at length about when you might turn up." The man

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rattled something in staccato Russian. "We'll have to have another chat, later."

The guards marched him to a claustrophobic cell containing a rude bunk suspended by steel chains, a washbasin and a reeking zinc commode. Locking the barred cell door with a rattle, they left him, their footfalls echoing hollowly into stillness.

Silverthorne clapped both hands over his ears to drown the wave of sterile subterranean silence. He stared at rough jackhammer scores disfiguring the walls of living rock that surrounded him while his mind seethed and writhed and came full circle. It was like looking into an infinity of mirrors.

Then he began to laugh. He rocked back on the lumpy, vermin-infested mattress, thumping his aching head on unyielding rock, holding his sides and roaring until tears streamed down his cheeks.

What had *Gauleiter* Kästner said there in the vanished *Weltanreich* of 2075? *The reflexive danger of promiscuous time travel would be overwhelming*. Overwhelming!

Poor Kästner. Oh God, if Kästner had only known!

Struggling for breath, Professor James Silverthorne laughed uncontrollably at the futile idiocy of it all.

It was the last time in his life he ever laughed. ★

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Timothy P. Lewis

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All they wanted was a little property for a shrine . . . .

MOST OF THE CHURCHES are closed now, although they remained open for a long time even after people found out the truth. I spend a lot of time on the terrace of my three-million-dollar villa in the Poconos though, staring at the stars and wondering how much they *really* knew and how much they *really* told us.

The entire National Guard and most of the police force was already in place and you could hear the sirens screaming from all the way down in the Village as the latecomers hurried to make the show, but they were going to be too late. A door slid open in the side of the spaceship, a ramp descended and out strolled the alien, calm as you please. There wasn't a single raygun or snarling monster in sight. The kids were disappointed as hell.

We'd been waiting since before six that morning. We lived right across the street from the park back then, in a chrome-and-plaster townhouse we were too poor to afford and too socially conscious not to have. Davey first saw the thing sitting out by the lake about five in the morning—you'd think in a city this size someone would have seen or heard it land, but that just doesn't seem to be the case—and he woke up the whole family, dragging us into his bedroom to look out the window at it.

We got dressed and made it inside the park before the police cordon closed things off and when the Guardsmen came around about nine to chase everyone away, my U.N. pass seemed to muddy up the picture sufficiently for them to allow us to stay. There were nearly a million people crowding around the park gates by noon, trying to find a way to worm in on the action, but Davey, Cliff and I were right there in the front row all along, waiting for the Big Moment. Then this second-rater from the next galaxy over trots out of his ship with the Historic Greeting and all he can come up with is "Good morning. I'd like to speak with someone in property management."

He got bad press from it. People expect Historic Greetings to be a little more weighty than something you might say to the receptionist at the neighborhood savings and loan. One magazine took it so seriously that it ran a contest asking its readers what the alien *should* have said, the purpose being, I suppose, to offer pointers to the next celestial visitor before he got a chance to ruin the moment. Folks would have been a lot happier with "Take me to your leader."

The guardsmen, of course, were

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in a perfect quandary over how to respond to his request. The commander of the Guard immediately called me over, his underlings having dutifully reported that a representative of the United Nations was in the gallery. His intentions, no doubt, were to handle the affair in a grandly cosmopolitan manner, and there could have been no action more appropriate—had the alien been interested in philately.

The United Nations, as you may know, makes a tidy sum every year issuing its own postage stamps. It's something the organization has in common with small individual nations like Monaco and Botswana; they have found printing pretty pictures with foul-tasting glue on the back can be more profitable than printing money. Once the U.N. authorizes a new stamp and it is drawn and perforated and the proper amount of gluck is spread liberally on the reverse, the project is turned over to me. I then write exciting releases for the stamp magazines, intimating that any collection not including the new U.N. threepenny gold might just as well be burned. I'm sure N'Zorn knew nothing about it.

N'Zorn, it turned out, was the alien's name. I wasn't excited about meeting him on a face-to-face basis—watching is one thing and negotiating another—but the Guardsmen dragged me forward by the arm and the kids cheered and the reporters snapped photographs and who can deny a place in history when it is offered so graciously? Quivering in terror, I went over to the alien.

N'Zorn wasn't really all that horrid to look at. In fact, he was rather interesting. He looked a little like a breadfruit and smelled a great deal like liverwurst. Eight spindly spider legs came out out of his underside and he had a tiny orange-colored head, covered with mucous that seemed to glide about the top of his torso.

Beneath the mucous there were two dark spots where his eyes were probably located, although I have no idea how they were able to focus through that slime. I also have no idea where his voice came from, but it came.

"My name is N'Zorn," the alien said, "and I come from the planet Morshle. We are very friendly people."

"My name is Albert Figg," I told him, and one of the reporters in the back row asked loudly if I could spell it out for him. That took a moment but by the time I got around to resuming my conversation with N'Zorn, I had my thoughts more properly in order and I was able to ask some intelligent questions.

I asked him, "What brings you to Earth today?"

"We have no wish to disturb your culture," N'Zorn said, glad to get down to business, "but we find it necessary to inquire of you the

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possibility of a real-estate transaction."

Now, Davey brings home a lot of science fiction and I read some of it occasionally, so I knew enough to realize that this was the point where things usually got sticky. The well-meaning earthling starts chatting with the emissary from Procyon and winds up selling the earth for $24 in interplanetary trinkets and throwing the rest of the interstellar neighborhood into the bargain as well. However I, as you may know, am no fool.

"How much real estate?" I asked him.

"A very small parcel, as remote as possible," I was told. "If we understand your terminology, what we are looking for would be about five or six square miles."

This, perhaps, was a coincidence and some people have argued that case. Others claim it was predestination, Divine Intervention or dumb luck. The fact of the matter was, I had done rather well in the U.N. stamp business and managed to set aside a good amount of my earnings for investment—in real estate. You meet some curious folks in any international organization and among my acquaintances was a certain individual from Borneo named—well, his name isn't as important as the fact that I've had a number of occasions in the past to buy parcels from him, entirely on speculation. Most of these were remote Pacific islands. Yolanda thought I was crazy when I first started to pick them up back in the 50s but it turns out to be among the shrewdest things I've done. The world's becoming overcrowded rapidly, you see, and there's precious little place to get away from it all. Therefore, those who can afford it, and my buyers range from movie stars to oil tsars, are more than happy to plunk down six figures for a hunk of basalt they're going to have the devil's own time getting to. And they hide out for a year or two and get bored and come home or else they start selling macadamia nuts and petrel guano and make their fortunes. It really makes little difference to me.

I have, over the years, purchased twenty-two islands in the vicinity of Borneo that were quite livable but which my friend's government could find no serious use for. I had sold twenty-one of them and, by a stroke of luck, had one remaining that was five or six square miles in area. I told N'Zorn about it and he said this was just what he had in mind.

"And how were you considering paying for this parcel?" I asked.

N'Zorn made a sound something like a belch and skittered back up the ramp into the spaceship. That surprised me a great deal since it had appeared things were going nicely and there didn't seem to be grounds for his taking offense. I was wondering if he had been called in to administer some biological function when he reappeared on

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the ramp and scampered back to me, holding up his purchasing power.

I didn't recognize it at first. You don't normally see diamonds that large. It was later remarked to me that this was a very logical means of exchange in the galaxy since diamonds are the crystallized form of one of the more common elements, they are gradable into levels of greatly differing quality and, for unaesthetic races, they have considerable industrial application. N'Zorn's diamond was about the size of a clenched fist, probably not the biggest on record but assuredly the first from outer space and more than adequate for the purpose. It looked remarkably pure to my untrained eye and I decided that if he wanted change, I was going to have a hard time coming up with it. When the stone finally *was* examined by a competent jeweler, I was told that N'Zorn could have used it to buy something larger, like Hawaii, if anyone had been selling. But as I said before, I am no fool and I have read Davey's science-fiction numbers. I wasn't about to get caught on a bad deal.

"Before we shake on it," I told N'Zorn, forgetting for the moment that none of his appendages seemed to contain anything he could shake with, "suppose you tell me what you're planning to do with this site? Will you develop it in some manner?"

"As I have said," N'Zorn assured me, "we have no desire to interfere with your culture. You are a young race and must develop in your own way, in your own time. For that reason, we will seal off our property so that our presence will not affect your progress."

"I appreciate your good intentions," I said, "but before I sell the island, I'd like to know specifically what purpose you have in mind for the land."

"It is to be a stopping point for the Great Pilgrimage," N'Zorn said solemnly. "An oasis where our travelers may stop and rest and refuel on the Road to God."

The people around us stopped whispering and the park seemed to grow unnaturally quiet. A wind sprang up from somewhere and a cloud began to roll over the city.

"The Road to God?" I asked.

"It is our most important pathway through the stars," N'Zorn said. "A thousand races will follow it when it is completed. It will take them to the Almighty, the Creator of the Universe."

"You know where He is? That He exists?"

"I can tell you no more," N'Zorn replied, his voice softer. "It is something your race must discover for itself, in its own time."

How could you stand in the way of something like that? Reluctantly, I took the diamond.

Of course I got a lot of flak about it. People didn't think it was right, selling property to aliens. At first

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there were rumbles about Congress taking action, invoking some sort of law to forbid Americans the right of "negotiating a treaty with foreign powers, without the proper consent of the government." Or something of the sort. It was then pointed out that Americans are constantly selling things to other nations without the consent of Congress, with no question of unauthorized treaties. There was no differentiation in international law between selling to another country or another world, probably because no one had ever thought of it. I was also briefly supported by the argument that, as a representative of the United Nations, I paid no taxes to the United States government and was diplomatically immune from its sanctions in matters of this nature. That really didn't matter, though, because as soon as word got out, I was fired. That really didn't matter either because when I was fired, the diamond's sale had already made me rich and people were beginning to come to me about book and movie rights.

In the end it was decided to let the matter go. It didn't seem right to try to renege on our very first deal with extra-terrestials. The "Road to God" bit was getting to people as well. The Pope tried to rationalize it along church doctrine for a while and then gave up, disappearing behind the doors of the Vatican for the next three months while the College of Cardinals struggled in vain trying to explain it to *him*. All sorts of religious groups formed to capitalize on the situation, not the least of which was the Cosmic Hitchhikers Society, which believed they could get a ride on the Road to God by showing the aliens the proper beatific attitude, and the Glory Roaders, who claimed they'd already made the journey and had come back to spread The Truth.

They were, all in their own ways, bonkers.

The saucer stayed on for three days in the park so that N'Zorn could, he said, reassure people that the Morshles had the best interests of Earth in mind. He even went on the Johnny Carson show to stress

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American Heart Association

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the point but unfortunately he came on after a pontifical sports announcer-cum-celebrity and never got the chance to say everything he wanted to.

On the fourth morning the saucer was gone. No one saw it leave, which was particularly strange since the park was filled with people keeping a vigil on the ship and the National Guard was maintaining an armed watch around it, purely as a precautionary measure. People who claim to have stared right at the vessel all night long scratched their heads in bewilderment the next morning and said they just couldn't find the moment in their memories when they realized it was gone. It made some of them very uneasy.

The aliens didn't come back to the park. That, of course, delighted the critics, who said we'd all been put upon by some prankster with a cardboard spaceship that had been dismantled in the dead of night and whisked away. That didn't explain my diamond but people have a knack for disregarding facts that don't properly fit their explanations. I was rich and the aliens were gone, along with their Road to God, and everyone was perfectly happy to leave it at that.

Two years later *The Lady Capricorn* out of Brisbane sank after running into a wall in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. It was my fault, really.

When there was no further word from the visitors from outer space, I went ahead and sold the island again. There didn't seem to be any other sensible options since no one had showed up to claim ownership. I'm the first to admit that I never really checked the situation but I thought I'd at least have *heard* if the aliens moved into the neighborhood. So, on December fourth I sold the property to Walter Marriott with the understanding that I would not inform his ex-wife Luella "where the damned rock's at." Walter boarded a plane headed toward the sunset and three weeks later they were yanking him out of the ocean, spitting fire and swearing he'd use me as shark bait at the earliest opportunity. I read his story in the newspapers shortly after arriving at my new hideaway villa near—the middle of the Poconos somewhere.

Walter had arrived in Australia and quickly made the acquaintance of a beer-drinking sea captain named Theophelt Van Arsdale. Theo agreed to take him out to the island and keep quiet about it, and they set sail in *The Lady Capricorn*. On December fifteenth the captain was up before dawn and noticed a blue light near the horizon, in the shape of a hemisphere set low on the water. It was gone at sun-up and he wrote it off to the American beer Walter had brought along. They continued in that direction and late in the afternoon both men were standing on the flying bridge when Theo pointed out with interest that the sea ahead of them looked re-

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markably calm. It was a choppy day on the rest of the ocean, but the waves just ahead seemed to subside along an arcing line and beyond that there were no waves at all. They were watching the line as *The Lady Capricorn* approached it, and suddenly the entire bow of the craft buckled as if she had run full-throttle into a seawall. The ship went straight to the bottom, taking Theo with her, but the impact threw their lorry free abaft and Walter managed to climb inside. He rode the currents for four days before he was found by a channel shrimper and brought back to civilization to tell his story. Everyone said he was sunstruck.

Bizarre occurrences of this nature do attract attention though, and within a fortnight three vessels were steaming out of port for the island—one of them on the official investigation and two out to prove that the Bermuda Triangle had shifted to the Eastern Hemisphere.

No one ever again heard from any of the passengers of the three ships.

By the time the fourth ship was suspected lost, I figured I had to step in and remind folks that this was the same island I had sold to N'Zorn two years earlier. I knew it wouldn't set well with people but Yolanda insisted, and so I made an anonymous long-distance call to the *Times*, hoping they would carry the matter from there and be unable to find me. The next morning reporters were crawling all over the yard, trampling my begonias and taking pictures of Yolanda through the window.

I really couldn't tell them anything. I wasn't the one who had been running into things in the Pacific, after all. It didn't take long for the government to find me after the reporters had though, and by noon three black Cadillacs were rolling up the drive. Six carbon-copy men emerged from the three cars. Each wore a gray and olive-green sports jacket, herringbone, with solid gray slacks. Each had sunglasses and each wore his blond hair just long enough to cover the pink of his scalp. I peered through the peephole in the door as they showed their government badges simultaneously and then I opened the door for them. Only one spoke.

"Mr. Figg, your government has need of you," the gentleman said and in the background I thought, for an instant, I heard a band playing *The Stars and Stripes Forever*.

They took me to New York. Then they took me to Washington, where they asked me questions at the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill. I couldn't tell them anything new or informative about the aliens, the island or life in general, so they took me to Texas. At that point I was ready to confess to anything but they put me on a large plane and flew west. In Hawaii they put me in a smaller plane and flew south, and in Borneo they put me on the small-

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est plane of all and flew me over the island.

We were, it seems, latecomers. The perimeter of 'solid' area had been pretty well determined by this time and an entire fleet had grown up around the limits of the calm water. There were $100,000-yachts with captains sipping Scotch amid bevies of barely dressed beauties and there were foundering junks crowded with pilgrims who chanted, burned incense and danced about their decks in endless enthusiasm. They had all come to catch a glimpse of the Road to God.

"Do you know what this means to them?" General Thurmond DeVries asked at my left as the pilot banked to give me a good view through the windows. "There are a hundred boats down there and they just found out about it three days ago. In time, the sea will be choked with them. They all come to be near the pathway to God. A lot of them will die trying to get through, even though they know they can't, because they can't stand the thought that the path to Salvation is blocked to them."

"You say that as though it were my fault, General," I said. "It isn't, you know."

The general was quiet for a moment, looking down at the boats. I watched as well and while I did, one of the junks cranked up and ran headlong into the invisible wall. There was a great deal of smoke and fire and, no doubt, loud noise. Several other boats drifted over to help but when the ship disappeared beneath the waves, I couldn't see any bodies in the water. The general waved the pilot on.

The plane, evidently, could fly over the calm water. I was sure the general would not have attempted it unless there had been a few previous trial runs, and I remembered Walter's mention of the blue sphere Theo had seen the night before his death. A dome-shaped field, perhaps? At one point I thought I saw a blackened, twisted piece of metal between ourselves and the water, as if floating on air, but I can't be sure. It might have been a bird.

The island came up slowly on the horizon and it was much smaller than I'd imagined. Later I found out that it was less than a square mile in area, a fact that quickly ended my relationship with the gentleman from Borneo. The area of calm water, however, extended a full five miles in every direction, a bit more than what they'd paid for, so things seemed to even out.

You couldn't see much on the island at first. The side we were approaching rose sharply from the sea, marked by jagged peaks and verdant slopes. Then the plane went over the ridge.

There was a city on the other side of the mountain. A city of gleaming orange spires that reached hundreds of meters into the sky. There were great domed structures that shone

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like polished silver and sinuous tubes that wound aimlessly around and through everything until the complex looked like New York City buried beneath a heap of spaghetti. The most impressive item, of course, was the port. It was a broad, flat area that seemed to be made of mirrorlike, fused sand, and on it stood a variety of vessels. There were tall, needle-shaped ships that stood on fins and reminded me of the renderings in the pulp magazines a decade or so before space flight. There were flying saucers as well, but there my proficiency as an extra-terrestial ship-spotter ended. There were things that resembled the insulators on an electric pole and things that looked like flowerpots and things that looked like frogs. There were things that looked like pied type and things that looked like amalgamations of assorted nails and things that didn't look like anything at all.

"They're all spaceships," the general said. "They keep coming and going so fast we can't keep accurate numbers on them. But it's a busy port, busier than O'Hare, and they're all going, or coming from, somewhere. They're going on the Road to God."

I shifted uncomfortably in my seat.

"It makes you wonder . . . what they know," I suggested. It didn't seem incredibly profound but it suited the general's mood and he gave me a grunt of approval.

"We know what they know, and that's the problem, Figg. They know the truth. About God. Doesn't that scare you?"

"Scare me? Why should it scare me? I think it should be sufficient to know there *is* a truth and that God exists somewhere down the line."

"And that's all you need to know about it?"

"The aliens have made it pretty clear that's all they're telling us. I don't see why I should have to know anything more. I mean, *they're* the ones who found Him. They should know what they're doing."

The general stared at me for a moment and I confess that I was totally at a loss to determine what he was thinking. After he finished staring, he sucked in a deep breath and studied the ceiling of the plane for a while before he spoke again.

"There are many people who don't agree with you, Figg," he said. "Governments are finding themselves faced with creeping anarchy. People are obsessed by the idea that this thing is here and they can't get at it. It's shaking a lot of faith. It's bad for us to know—and not know. Can't you understand that?"

His eyes, for some reason, looked desperate despite the fact that we were engaged in an orderly, intellectual discussion. I decided it would be best if I let him ruminate by himself and merely said, "Then

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we shall have to try to live as best we can, knowing only what we know." I think he caught my point because he was quiet all the way home.

They took me back to Borneo, and back to Hawaii, and back to Texas and then back home. When I got there, Yolanda had left with the kids. There was a note on the refrigerator saying she didn't want anything to do with it any more. I spent the night drinking alone.

The news in the morning was bad. A battleship from Korea had tried to blast its way through the barrier and ricocheting charges had demolished seventeen of the pilgrim yachts. There were riots in Rome, Buenos Aires, Calcutta, Madrid, Bangkok, Cedar Rapids. Absenteeism rose. Factories were empty. Churches were full.

Crime fell and apathy rose. In the streets we could see people roaming about aimlessly, their eyes glazed, staring at the sun, or at the pavement, but never glancing at one another. The military overthrew the government of India and declared the Kingdom of God. The clergy did the same thing, in slightly more revolutionary (and bloody) fashion, in Brazil. Things, as some were wont to say, were going straight to Hell.

It did not come as a great surprise, then, when it was announced one morning that they'd dropped the Bomb on the island. The official attitude was, "What the heck, we can't live with them anyway."

And the Bomb worked. The papers had pictures, three days later, of the devastation on the island. You really couldn't tell that those ruins had once been the City on the Road to God rather than Dresden or Hiroshima. But I knew they were. I used to own the place.

I found myself gripped with an overwhelming sadness. I drank quite a bit and when there was no more to drink, I would take long walks down the road to the canyon, where I would stand by the river near the falls and listen to the birds call me "Nit-Whit! Nit-Whit! Nit-whit!"

Five days after the Bomb something else joined the birds. There was a voice that called from the forest and said, "Hello, Figg. I'm sorry that it didn't work out." I turned—and it was N'Zorn.

His spaceship rested on the edge of the forest. His skin looked wrinkled and peeling. He might have been hurt but with N'Zorn it was hard to tell.

"Hello," I greeted him. "I'm glad the Bomb didn't hurt you. I didn't know they were planning to use it."

"I know that," he said. "That's why I knew it would be all right to come and say good-bye. You tried to do your best for us but it just wasn't ordained to work out."

"I suppose you'll set up another station, then, on the Road to God," I suggested. "Someplace where they

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can't hurt you. On the Moon, maybe."

"No. This station was essential. But we could not use it and associate with you at the same time, and that's what destroyed the dream. Perhaps it was our own prejudices that destroyed it. In any event, we have to leave. Thank you, Figg."

I could tell he was getting ready to take off but I had been thinking about the things the general had said in the plane, and I delayed him.

"N'Zorn?" I called and he turned his eyespots toward me. "Do you *really* know where He is? You *really* found Him?"

"Yes," he replied, reverently.

"Were? Can you tell me?"

N'Zorn paused for a moment as if thinking. Then he seemed to nod. "Yes, Figg," he said. "Every road has its end, and this was ours. He was here." ★

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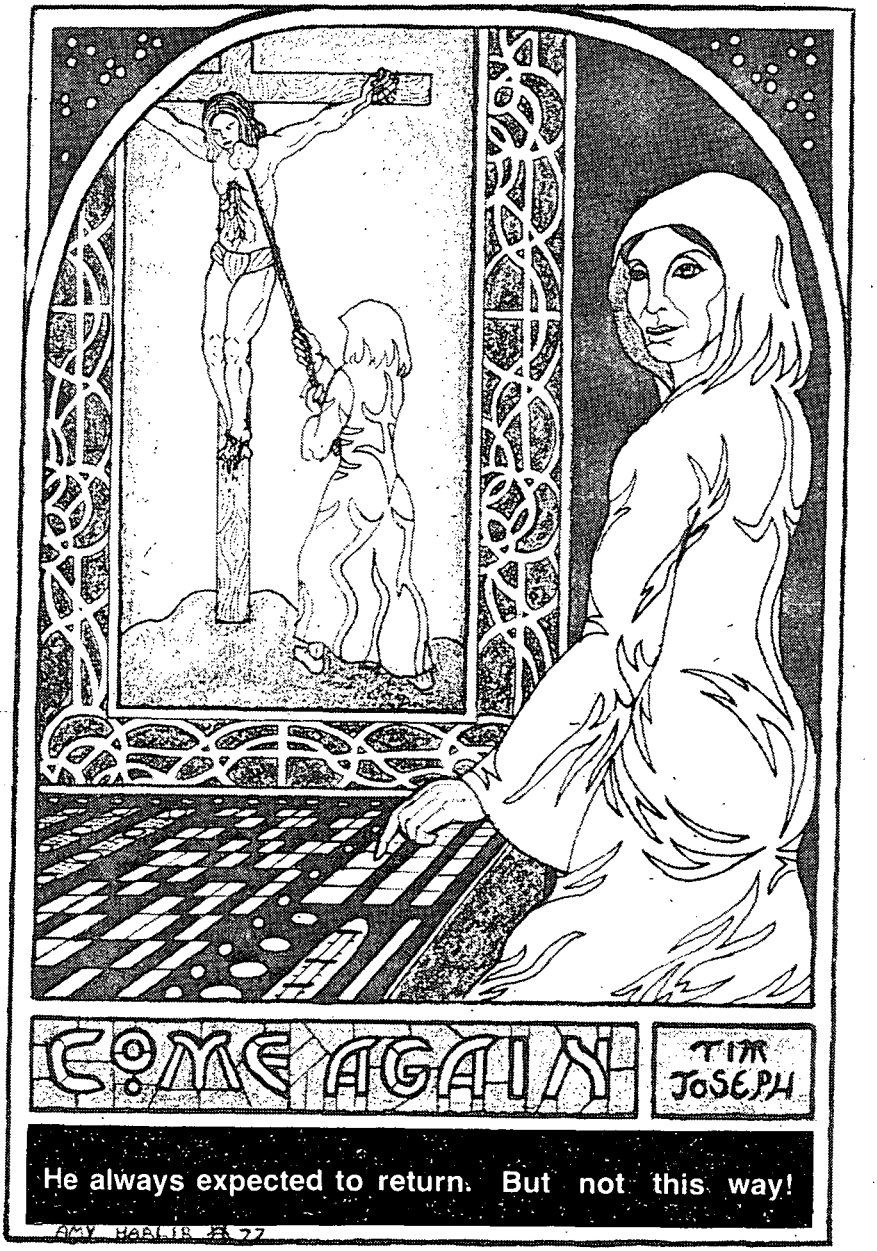

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DOCTOR HARRIMAN came out of the bedroom and closed the door softly behind him. He showed weariness in his face and in the way he moved. His sparse white hair stood in rumpled confusion, and his face seemed to sag under the weight of the dark circles below his eyes. Marie was tired too, but on her it didn't show. She was younger; that helped, but she was also excited.

The doctor nodded as he sank down into an armchair. He accepted a glass, sipped cautiously and grimaced at the taste of Tequila. "I don't suppose you've got anything decent?" he asked.

Marie pushed aside a pile of books and produced another bottle. "One sixty rum?" she offered. He sank deeper into the chair with a weary sigh. Marie took her own drink and sat in the chair facing him. She sipped quietly and waited.

"He'll live," Harriman said at last. "It was close: a couple of more hours without attention and he might not have. He's asleep now, probably won't wake for another twelve hours or so." He looked at Marie, who refused to meet his eyes.

"Thank God," she said. "I was afraid I hadn't got to him in time." Her relief seemed genuine enough, but she still wouldn't look at the doctor.

"All right Marie, Who is he?"

"I can't tell you." She played with her drink and looked at the floor. "I really appreciate your coming down here, Matt, and certainly you deserve an explanation, but it's important that no one know who he is until the proper time." She looked up and this time their eyes met. "You've got to believe me," she pleaded.

"Oh, I believe you." he said mildly. "But it doesn't make any difference. You call me away from my dinner to come down here. You insist that I treat this man here instead of taking him to a hospital where by all rights he belongs. All right, you're an old friend and he needed help, not arguments. That much I'll do for you. But this man has been beaten, stabbed, tortured, and drugged. He's suffering from shock and exposure. He didn't get that way accidentally; someone wanted him to die and to die painfully. Unless you can give me a very good explanation for what happened to him and why he is here, when I leave this house I'm going straight to the police."

Marie opened her mouth to argue, but his expression told her that it would be useless. She surrendered. "Okay, but it's a long story and we're both pretty tired. Why don't we get some sleep first? You can use my guest room. In the morning I'll tell you the whole story."

"Now Marie." The voice left no room for dispute. She considered for a moment, then: "What do you know about time travel?"

"Nothing."

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"Except that it's impossible," she prompted.

"And that you're about to tell me it's not."

"Right. According to theory there is no reason why the temporal flow has to be in only one direction: any physicist will tell you that the mathematics don't exclude it. In my own lab we've gotten results that can't be explained any other way. Of course we call it temporal phenomenon instead of time travel, and we worked with atomic particles and fractions of a second, but there's no doubt that the results were real. We applied for a grant to study it but no one would take us seriously. Fortunately there are other ways to get research money besides grants. There are, for instance, private fortunes."

"Your own?" Harriman asked. He knew that Marie had inherited several million dollars and that this sum had grown considerably since then.

She shrugged. "What else have I got to do with my money? Anyway, we have since learned that the effect doesn't have to be restricted to small particles or short lengths of time." She glanced over her shoulder at the doorway. "Down that hall is a working time machine." She paused to wait for the doctor's reaction, but there was none. Finally she went on.

"Actually it's primarily a viewer. There's a screen and by setting the controls properly, I can watch any event that has ever happened. It also has the capability of projecting an object up to about three hundred pounds through time but it takes a great deal of energy. So far it has been done twice, three times if you count the return trip." She paused again.

"You're a hard man to impress, Matt," she said. "I tell you that I've traveled in time and you don't even bat an eye. Congratulate me. Tell me I'm crazy. Say something!"

"I'm sceptical."

She nodded. "Well, I guess that's something. All right, Matt, suppose you had a machine that could look into the past. What would you look at first?"

"I don't know. Famous events, I suppose. Kennedy's assassination, the crucifixion, the storming of the Bastille, construction of the pyramids, the fall of Troy."

"I've seen them all," she told him. She went to a table in the corner of the room and picked up a copy of the New Testament. "Do you know how long Jesus was on the cross?" she asked.

"A day?" Dr. Harriman guessed.

"Four hours. Do you know how long it usually took the victim of crucifixion to die?"

"No."

"Three or four days. Why do you think Jesus died so fast?"

"I don't know."

Marie opened the book and began to read. " 'And about the ninth

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hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *E'-li, E'-li, La'-ma sa-vach-tha-ni*? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, this man calleth for E-li'-as. And straightaway one of them ran and took a sponge and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be. Let us see whether E-li'-as will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.' Matthew.

"It was common to use a dilute mixture of water and vinegar to revive the victim," Marie explained, "though it seems not to have helped here." She flipped through the pages and began reading again.

" 'Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.' John.

"The legs of the other two were broken to speed their deaths," Marie said. "It was required that the bodies be taken down before the beginning of the Sabbath." She turned the pages again and began reading once more.

" 'And Pilate marveled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead.' Mark."

She closed the book and sat down. After a while Dr. Harriman spoke.

"He wasn't dead?"

"No."

"And the man in the bedroom. . ."

"Is Jesus of Nazareth." She finished the statement. "One thing the gospels were wrong about. It was a woman who gave the vinegar to Jesus, and the vinegar was drugged. That was the first time I used the machine to transport a person. When he was taken down and placed in the tomb, I used it again to bring him here. Then I called you."

"Do you really expect me to believe this?" Dr. Harriman asked.

"No," she replied. "But then, you insisted that I tell you."

She took him down the hall to a room filled with banks of electronic equipment. There was a television screen mounted above a control consol where she sat. Harriman stood behind her and watched. The screen lit up to show three men lashed to scaffolding on the top of a hill. A crowd of people milled around below, and a handlettered sign was nailed above the center figure. Part of it was in Latin and said, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." The rest was in two different languages, presumably giving the same message.

"You'll notice," Marie said, "that he was crucified on a permanent scaffolding rather than an actual

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cross, Also, there are no nails. We know that the usual practice was to tie the victim, but tradition has it that in the case of Jesus they used nails. As you can see, they didn't."

She was about to say something more when the man on the screen cried out. The doctor couldn't understand what he said, but a figure, heavily draped in white robes, stepped out of the crowd and lifted a sponge on the end of a stick. Jesus drank from it, cried something, and went limp. Harriman studied the robed figure that had offered the drink, but was unable to recognize Marie or even determine the gender.

During the next half hour Marie showed him the Kennedy assassination (there was only one gunman), the signing of the Declaration of Independence, part of the Gettysburg Address, the assassination of Caesar, and Galileo dropping balls from a tower.

"This is fascinating," he said at last, "but it proves nothing. I have no way of knowing whether all this is authentic. You can sit here and show me history all night, but for all I know, it could be just film clips on videotape."

Marie adjusted the controls again and the screen showed a darkened hospital room with an old woman sleeping fitfully on the bed. The room brightened briefly as the door opened to admit a man wearing a white coat. Dr. Harriman recognized himself. He had one hand in his pocket, and when he neared the woman, he withdrew a syringe. He stood looking at the woman for a moment and then stooped, inserted the needle, and injected the contents of the syringe into her arm. "Stop!" he shouted.

The screen went blank and Marie turned to find the doctor pale and trembling. "She had terminal cancer." he said with an unsteady voice. "She was in pain every minute. Would have lived another few weeks maybe, no more. She asked her doctor to let her die, but he refused." He finally tore his gaze away from the blank screen and looked at Marie. "No one ever knew," he said.

They went back to the study where Marie poured him another drink. "What would have happened if you went through the machine and stopped me from killing her?" he asked. "Or if you stopped Oswald or killed your grandmother?" he added, beginning to realize the implications of what he had seen.

Marie shook her head. "I don't know. I haven't tried to change anything. I don't know what would happen if I did."

Harriman looked at her incredulously. "You haven't tried to change anything?" he repeated. "No, of course not. You just snatched Jesus Christ is all."

"But I didn't change anything," she insisted. "The first time I watched the crucifixion it was exactly as you saw it. I watched myself give him the drug and I saw

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him pass out. I was even recorded by witnesses two thousand years ago. And the body did disappear. I would have been changing history by not going."

Harriman considered this for a while, but it was too much to follow. If she hadn't taken the body, she would have been changing history because back then she had taken it—or at least *somebody* had—but if she stopped Oswald, it was different because she hadn't. He gave it up.

"You don't believe in Jesus, do you?" he asked.

"Of course I believe in him. He's right there in the next room."

"Yes, but you don't believe that he is God, or even the Messiah?"

"No."

"Then why did you do it? Why bring him here? If he had died on the cross and remained in his tomb, there might never have been a Christian religion. You're not Christian. You don't even like Christians. I've heard you denounce them as narrow-minded, intolerant bigots. Yet here you've gone and created the whole basis for their beliefs. Why?"

She shrugged. "The bigots would be bigots anyway. If they weren't Christian bigots, they'd be Moslem bigots or Jewish bigots. It doesn't make any difference what they believe—just so they don't have to think. But Jesus, now there was an interesting person. How could I pass up the chance to talk to him? Besides, the set-up was too perfect. I'm watching the crucifixion and someone dressed so that he can't possibly be recognized walks up and administers what is obviously a drug; there was absolutely no question that he had been knocked out. And there I was with everything that was needed to make it all happen, just as it was written, and there was nothing at all mysterious or miraculous about it. I can go to the believers and say, 'Look, here's your great miracle, and I did it. Not God, just me.' "

"So now you've brought him back. I hope you don't regret it. Remember, regardless of what you think, he believes that he's the Messiah. The fact that he's been resurrected and brought back after two thousand years is not likely to convince him otherwise. Nor anyone else for that matter."

"That's ridiculous. He hasn't been resurrected. He never died. I have simply transported him through time."

"Yes, well I wish you the best of luck in explaining that, both to him and to his followers." He paused to consider. "It will be interesting to see what he thinks of those who are supposed to be his followers. And what they think of him." Dr. Harriman rose from his chair. "Well, I'll let you worry about that. I'm tired and I think I'll be getting home. Call me when he wakes up tomorrow. I'd like to be here when you tell him your name." ★

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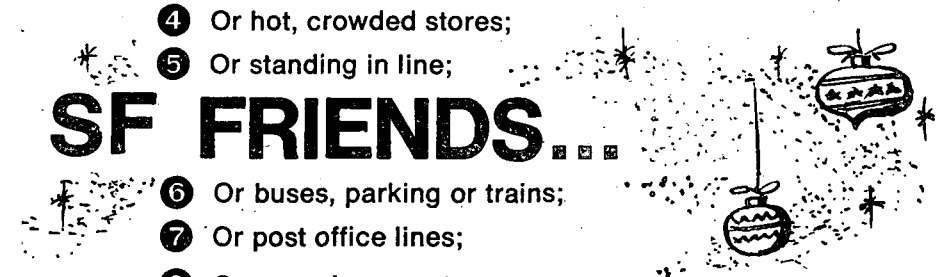

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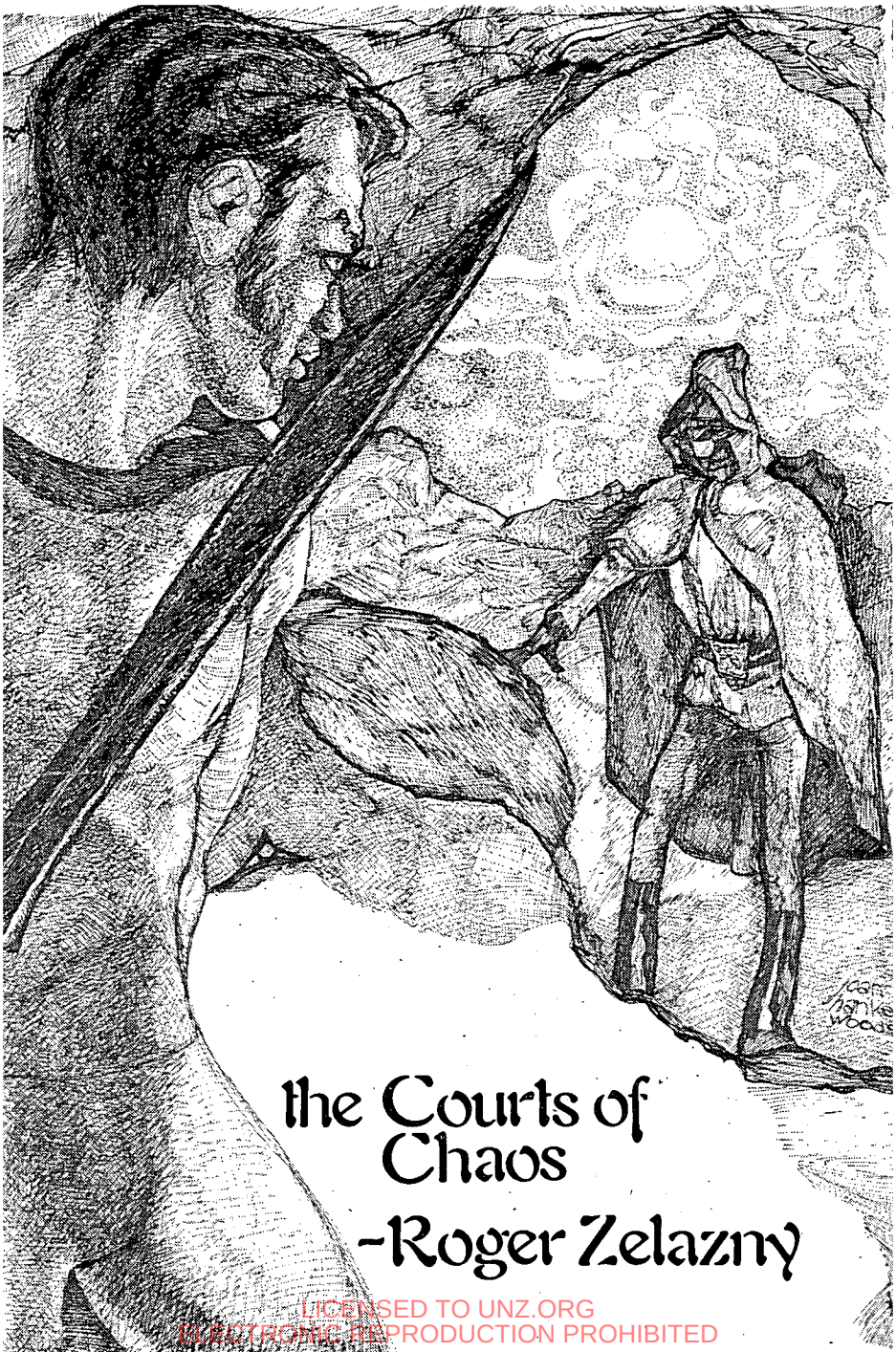

the Courts of Chaos

-Roger Zelazny

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All depends on the Pattern . . . .

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Hell. I was irritated with Dad. Now that he was back, I'd expected some answers. Instead, he began the secrecy routine again: private orders for just about everyone—except me—before he took off again, destination unstated. I decided to go and sulk in the library. Random finally came by with lunch and tried to persuade me that perhaps Dad knew what he was doing, that perhaps my feelings had a deeper source than the present situation. All right. I was willing to concede that but I was still irritated. Random persuaded me to quit the library, though, and accompany him downstairs to check on Martin, regarding whom Dad had said something typically cryptic on taking his leave.

Below, we witnessed a peculiar tableau in the throne room. Barred by some unnatural agency from entering, we saw Martin, Benedict and Dara within, Dara seated upon the throne. Gérard was finally forced to acknowledge her existence. There followed a reenactment of the situation in which I had participated in Tir-na Nog'th, the city in the sky. My blade Grayswandir appeared, as I had wielded it then, and engaged in battle with Benedict, finally striking from him the marvelous prosthesis he was using for a right arm—the object I had obtained in just that fashion from his ghostly double in that strange place of dreams. The arm and the blade vanished then and the force that restrained us was withdrawn.

Within, from Martin's peculiar Trumps, I learned of the existence of Merlin, my son by Dara—the strange youth whom I had encountered at the Courts of Chaos and who had declined a clear shot at me after he learned who I was.

Dara, Benedict, Random, Gérard, Martin and I adjourned then for a private discussion. I learned that Dara had lied to me about many things. She had arranged our meeting in a very calculated fashion so that I could beget Merlin.

While I was hardly in a position to cry rape over it, I felt more than a little used. Dara hastened to assure us that she was no longer in complete sympathy with her superiors' plans—although she seemed to favor the part that involved seeing Merlin on the throne of Amber. Brand had been a mere tool of the Courts. I gathered, his ambitions greater than his abilities to fulfill them.

Dara was not really for either side any longer, she said, although she professed a great liking for Dad. She then surprised us all by producing his signet ring and commencing to issue orders in his name—orders for such things as an immediate attack on the Courts of Chaos, to be led by Benedict.

We were not about to accept this situation so, suspecting that Dad might be conferring with Dworkin at the primal Pattern, we contacted Fiona there. She confirmed that this

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indeed was the case. Fiona also told me of her suspicion that Dad was going to try to repair the Pattern. She felt that no matter whether he succeeded or failed, he would be destroyed in the process. I asked her to find out if he had sent orders via Dara. When she got in touch with us later, she was in his presence and she confirmed that he had. I asked her to trump me through, which she did.

I spoke with Dad and was able to distract him sufficiently to permit me to snatch the Jewel of Judgment from him. Then I beat it out of Dworkin's quarters and headed down to the Pattern, where I intended to use the gem in an attempt to repair it myself. They were able to stop me, though. They reached through the Jewel and used it to paralyze me.

Dad retrieved the stone—and we had a talk. He told me of how he had once known the real Ganelon and why he had been forced to kill him. He revealed that he had turned the entire land of Lorraine into a trap with which to test me. He told me that it was he who had killed Benedict's servants, explaining that he had done it as part of a scheme whereby Dara and I would become lovers. He approved of the union. He had decided that I was to be his successor and Dara my queen.

Then I told him of my own decision; namely, that I did not want the throne. I believe he was shaken by this. He sent me back to Amber, telling me to prepare for a trip on horseback and to await his orders at an isolated spot outside the city. I did this, parting with Dara on better terms than I had thought I would.

I rode out to my tomb and waited. When Dad got in touch with me, he created a familiar red bird from my blood—a creature that would bring me the Jewel, wherever I might be, when he was through with it. Then he charged me to ride for the Courts of Chaos through Shadow as fast as I could go.

I began this journey—a hard hellride—with reality swimming about me. I realized that I had to stay ahead of a wave of Chaos that would arise with the Pattern's interruption. After I had gone some distance, the bird finally caught up with me, bringing me the Jewel. The time differential was such, though, that I would not know the results of Dad's efforts until later. And the Trumps no longer functioned because of the twisting reality had taken.

I rode on with the Jewel. Everything was fine until Brand trapped me within a circle of fire in a desolate, rocky location and demanded the Jewel. I managed to elude him, however, and continued on for a great distance. When I halted again, I was in a metallic garden spot in the middle of nowhere—and Brand was waiting.

This time he wanted to talk. I decided to hear him out. He told me that Dad had failed in his attempt to repair the Pattern and had perished in the process. He said that Amber was fallen as a result and that all the Shadow worlds were being destroyed as the wave of Chaos spread outward from where the Pattern had once stood. There

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was only one way to preserve things now, he insisted. I was to attune him to the Jewel in a manner he described to me and then surrender the stone to him so that he might quickly inscribe a new Pattern to save the day.

However, I had my suspicions as to what he truly intended to do with the Jewel. I felt it probable that he wanted it as a weapon to use against us; or conceivably he might want to use it to create a second Pattern, one that would give him his own private universe. Even had he been telling the truth, he was certainly not the person I wanted to see create the new Pattern; half-mad as I now felt him to be, I declined his offer. A few more bitter words were added to the many we had exchanged over the years. I moved to confront him physically. He departed.

I rode on, growing dangerously weary. Finally I had to stop to eat and rest. I located a mountain cave, had a cold supper, wrapped myself in my cloak and a blanket, and slept.

PART II

V.

I WAS AWAKENED by a sense of presence. Or maybe it was a noise and a sense of presence. Whatever, I was awake and I was certain that I was not alone. I tightened my grip on Grayswandir and opened my eyes. Beyond that, I did not move.

A soft light, like moonlight, came in through the cavemouth. There was a figure, possibly human, standing just inside. The lighting was such that I could not tell whether it faced me or faced outward. But then it took a step toward me.

I was on my feet, the point of my blade toward its breast. It halted.

"Peace," said a man's voice, in Thari. "I have but taken refuge from the storm. May I share your cave?"

"What storm?" I asked.

As if in answer, there came a roll of thunder followed by a gust of wind, bearing the smell of rain within it.

"Okay, that much is true," I said. "Make yourself comfortable."

He sat down, well inside, his back against the righthand wall of the cave. I folded my blanket for a pad and seated myself across from him. About four meters separated us. I located my pipe and filled it, then tried a match that had been with me from the shadow Earth. It lit, saving me a lot of trouble. The tobacco had a good smell, mixed with the damp breeze. I listened to the sounds of the rain and regarded the dark outline of my nameless companion. I thought over some possible dangers, but it had not been Brand's voice that had addressed me.

"This is no natural storm," the other said.

"Oh? How so?"

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"For one thing, it is coming out of the north. They never come out of the north, here, this time of year."

"That's how records are made."

"For another, I have never seen a storm behave this way. I have been watching it advance all day—just a steady line, moving slowly, front like a sheet of glass. So much lightning, it looks like a monstrous insect with hundreds of shiny legs. Most unnatural. And behind it, things have grown very distorted."

"That happens in the rain."

"Not that way. Everything seems to be changing its shape. Flowing. As if it is melting the world—or stamping away its forms."

I shuddered. I had thought that I was far enough ahead of the dark waves that I could take a little rest. Still, he might be wrong, and it could just be an unusual storm. But I did not want to take the chance. I rose and turned to the rear of the cave. I whistled.

No response. I went back and groped around.

"Something the matter?"

"My horse is gone."

"Could it have wandered off?"

"Must have. I'd have thought Star'd have better sense, though."

I went to the cavemouth but could see nothing. I was half-drenched in the instant I was there. I returned to my position beside the left wall.

"It seems like an ordinary enough storm to me," I said. "They sometimes get pretty bad in the mountains."

"Perhaps you know this country better than I do?"

"No, I am just traveling through—a thing I had better be continuing soon, too."

I touched the Jewel. I reached into it, then through it, out and up, with my mind. I felt the storm about me and ordered it away, with red pulses of energy corresponding to my heartbeats. Then I leaned back, found another match and relit my pipe. It would still take a while for the forces I had manipulated to do their work, against a stormfront of this size.

"It will not last too long," I said.

"How can you tell?"

"Privileged information."

He chuckled.

"According to some versions, this is the way that the world ends—beginning with a strange storm from out of the north."

"That's right," I said, "and this is it. Nothing to worry about, though. It will be all over, one way or the other, before too long."

"That stone you are wearing . . . it is giving off light."

"Yes."

"You were joking about this being the end, though—were you not?"

"No."

"You make me think of that line from the Holy Book: *The Archangel Corwin shall pass before the storm,*

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lightning upon his breast . . . . You would not be named Corwin, would you?''

''How does the rest of it go?''

''. . . *When asked where he travels, he shall say, 'To the ends of the Earth,' where he goes not knowing what enemy will aid him against another enemy, nor whom the Horn will touch.*''

''That's all?''

''All there is about the Archangel Corwin.''

''I have run into this difficulty with Scripture in the past. It tells you enough to get interested, but never enough to be of any immediate use. It is as though the author gets his kicks by tantalizing. One enemy against another? The Horn? Beats me.''

''Where *do* you travel?''

''Not too far, unless I can find my horse.''

I returned to the cavemouth. It was letting up now, with a glow like a moon behind some clouds to the west, another to the east. I looked both ways along the trail and down the slope to the valley. No horses anywhere in sight. I turned back to the cave. Just as I did, however, I heard Star's whinny far below me.

I called back to the stranger in the cave, ''I have to go. You can have the blanket.''

I do not know whether he replied, for I moved off into the drizzle then, picking my way down the slope. Again I exerted myself through the Jewel, and the drizzle halted, to be replaced by a mist.

The rocks were slippery, but I made it halfway down without stumbling. I paused then, both to catch my breath and to get my bearings. From that point, I was not certain as to the exact direction from which Star's whinny had come. The moonslight was a little stronger, visibility a bit better, but I saw nothing as I studied the prospect before me. I listened for several minutes.

Then I heard the whinny once more—from below, to my left, near a dark boulder, cairn or rocky outcrop. There did seem to be some sort of turmoil in the shadows at its base. Moving as quickly as I dared, I laid my course in that direction.

As I reached level ground and hurried toward the place of the action, I passed pockets of ground mist, stirred slightly by a breeze from out of the west, snaking silvery, about my ankles. I heard a grating, crunching sound, as of something heavy being pushed or rolled over a rocky surface. Then I caught sight of a gleam of light, low on the dark mass I was approaching.

Drawing nearer, I saw small, manlike forms outlined in a rectangle of light, struggling to move a great rocky slab. Faint echoes of a clattering sound and another whinny came from their direction. Then the stone began to move, swinging like the door that it probably was. The lighted area diminished, narrowed

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to a sliver, vanished with a booming sound, all of the struggling figures having first passed within.

When I finally reached that rocky mass, all was silent once again. I pressed my ear to the stone, but heard nothing. Whoever they were, they had taken my horse. I had never liked horse thieves, and I had killed my share in the past. And right now I needed Star as I had seldom needed a horse. So I groped about, seeking the edges of that stony gate.

It was not too difficult to describe its outlines with my fingertips. I probably located it sooner than I would have by daylight, when everything would have blended and merged more readily to baffle the eye. Knowing its situation, I sought further then, after some handhold by which I might draw it. They had seemed to be little guys, so I looked low.

I finally discovered what might have been the proper place and seized hold of it. I pulled then, but it was stubborn. Either they were disproportionately strong or there was a trick to it that I was missing.

No matter. There is a time for subtlety and a time for brute force. I was both angry and in a hurry, so the decision was made.

I began to draw upon the slab once again, tightening the muscles in my arms, my shoulders, my back, wishing Gérard were nearby. The door creaked. I kept pulling. It moved slightly—an inch, perhaps—and stuck. I did not slacken, but increased my effort. It creaked again.

I leaned backward, shifted my weight and braced my left foot against the rocky wall at the side of the portal. I pushed with it as I drew back. There was more creaking and some grinding as it moved again—another inch or so. Then it stopped and I could not budge it.

I released my grip and stood, flexing my arms. Then I put my shoulder to it and pushed the door back to its fully closed position. I took a deep breath and seized it again.

I put my left foot back where it had been. No gradual pressure this time. I yanked and shoved simultaneously.

There was a snapping sound and a clattering from within, and the door came forward about half a foot, grinding as it moved. It seemed freer now, though, so I got to my feet, reversed my position—back to wall—and found sufficient purchase to push it outward.

It moved more easily this time, but I could not resist placing my foot against it as it began to swing and thrusting forward as hard as I could. It shot through a full hundred-eighty degrees, slammed back against the rock on the other side with a great booming noise, fractured in several places, swayed, fell, and struck the ground with a crash that made it shudder, breaking off more fragments when it hit.

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Grayswandir was back in my hand before it struck, and I had dropped into a crouch and stolen a quick look about the corner.

Light . . . there was illumination beyond . . . from little lamps depending from hooks along the wall . . . beside the stairway . . . going down . . . to a place of greater light and some sounds . . . like music . . . .

There was no one in sight. I would have thought that the godawful din I had raised would have caught someone's attention, but the music continued. Either the sound—somehow—had not carried, or they did not give a damn. Either way . . . .

I rose and stepped over the threshold. My foot struck against a metal object. I picked it up and examined it. A twisted bolt. They had barred the door after themselves. I tossed it back over my shoulder and started down the stair.

The music—fiddles and pipes—grew louder as I advanced. From the breaking of the light, I could see that there was some sort of hall off to my right, from the foot of the stair. They were small steps and there were a lot of them. I did not bother with stealth, but hurried down to the landing.

When I turned and looked into the hall, I beheld a scene out of some drunken Irishman's dream. In a smoky, torchlit hall, hordes of meter-high people, red-faced and green-clad, were dancing to the music or quaffing what appeared to be mugs of ale while stamping their feet, slapping tabletops and each other, grinning, laughing and shouting.

Huge kegs lined one wall, and a number of revelers were queued up before the one that had been tapped. An enormous fire blazed in a pit at the far end of the room, its smoke being sucked back through a crevice in the rock wall, above a pair of cavemouths running anywhere. Star was tethered to a ring in the wall beside that pit, and a husky little man in a leather apron was grinding and honing some suspicious-looking instruments.

Several faces turned in my direction, there were shouts and suddenly the music stopped. The silence was almost complete.

I raised my blade to an overhand épée en garde position, pointed across the room toward Star. All faces were turned in my direction by then.

"I have come for my horse," I said. "Either you bring him to me or I come and get him. There will be a lot more blood the second way."

From off to my right, one of the men, larger and grayer than most of the others, cleared his throat.

"Begging your pardon," he began, "but how did you get in here?"

"You will be needing a new door," I said. "Go and look if you care to, if it makes any differ-

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ence—and it may. I will wait."

I stepped aside and put the wall to my back.

He nodded.

"I will do that."

And he darted by.

I could feel my anger-born strength flowing into and back out of the Jewel. One part of me wanted to cut and slash and stab my way across the room, another wanted a more humane settlement with people so much smaller than myself; and a third, and perhaps wiser, part suggested that the little guys might not be such pushovers. So I waited to see how my door-opening feat impressed their spokesman.

Moments later, he returned, giving me wide berth.

"Bring the man his horse," he said.

A sudden flurry of conversation occurred within the hall. I lowered my blade.

"My apologies," said the one who had given the order. "We desire no trouble with the like of you. We will be foraging elsewhere. No hard feelings, I hope?"

The man in the leather apron had untethered Star and started in my direction. The revelers drew back to make way as he led my mount through the hall.

I sighed.

"I will just call it a day and forgive and forget," I said.

The little man seized a flagon from a nearby table and passed it to me. Seeing my expression, he sipped from it himself.

"Join us in a drink, then?"

"Why not?" I said, and I took it and quaffed it as he did the same with a second one.

He gave a gentle belch and grinned.

" 'Tis a mighty small draught for a man of your size," he said. "Let me fetch you another, for the trail."

It was a pleasant ale, and I was thirsty after my efforts.

"All right," I said.

He called for more as Star was delivered to me.

"You can wrap the reins around this hook here," he said, indicating a low projection near the doorway, "and he will be safe out of the way."

I nodded and did that as the butcher withdrew. No one was staring at me any longer. A pitcher of the brew arrived and the little man refilled our flagons from it. One of the fiddlers struck up a fresh tune. Moments later, another joined him.

"Sit a spell," said my host, pushing a bench in my direction with his foot. "Keep your back to the wall as you would. There will be no funny business."

I did, and he rounded the table and seated himself across from me, the pitcher between us. It was good to sit for a few moments, to take my mind from my journey for just a little while, to drink the dark ale and listen to a lively tune.

"I will not be apologizing

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again," said my companion, "nor explaining either. We both know it was no misunderstanding. But you have got the right on your side, it is plain to see." He grinned and winked. "So I am for calling it a day, too. We will not starve. We will just not feast tonight. 'Tis a lovely jewel you are wearing. Tell me about it?"

"Just a stone," I said.

The dancing resumed. The voices grew louder. I finished my drink and he refilled the flagon. The fire undulated. The night's cold went out of my bones.

"Cozy place you've got here," I said.

"Oh, that it is. Served us for time out of mind, it has. Would you be liking the grand tour?"

"Thank you, no."

"I did not think so, but 'twas my hostly duty to offer. You are welcome to join in the dancing, too, if you wish."

I shook my head and laughed. The thought of my cavorting in this place brought me images out of Swift.

"Thanks anyway."

He produced a clay pipe and proceeded to fill it. I cleaned my own and did the same. Somehow all danger seemed past. He was a genial enough little fellow, and the others seemed harmless now with their music and their stepping.

Yet . . . I knew the stories from another place, far, so far from here . . . . To awaken in the morning, naked, in some field, all traces of this spot vanished . . . I knew, yet . . . .

A few drinks seemed small peril. They were warming me now, and the keening of the pipes and the wailings of the fiddles were pleasant after the brain-numbing twistings of the hellride. I leaned back and puffed smoke. I watched the dancers.

The little man was talking, talking. Everyone else was ignoring me. Good. I was hearing some fantastic yarn of knights and wars and treasures. Though I gave it less than half an ear, it lulled me, even drew a few chuckles.

Inside, though, my nastier, wiser self was warning me: All right, Corwin, you have had enough. Time to take your leave. . . .

But, magically it seemed, my glass had been refilled, and I took it and sipped from it. One more, one more is all right.

No, said my other self, he is laying a spell on you. Can't you feel it?

I did not feel that any dwarf could drink me under the table. But I was tired, and I had not eaten much. Perhaps it would be prudent . . . .

I felt myself nodding. I placed my pipe on the table. Each time that I blinked it seemed to take longer to reopen my eyes. I was pleasantly warm now, with just the least bit of delicious numbness in my tired muscles.

I caught myself nodding, twice. I

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tried to think of my mission, of my personal safety, of Star . . . I mumbled something, still vaguely awake behind closed eyelids. It would be so good, just to remain this way half a minute more . . . .

The little man's voice, musical, grew monotonous, dropped to a drone. It did not really matter what he was say—

Star whinnied.

I sat bolt upright, eyes wide, and the tableau before me swept all sleep from my mind.

The musicians continued their performance, but now no one was dancing. All of the revelers were advancing quietly upon me. Each held something in his hand—a flask, a cudgel, a blade. The one in the leather apron brandished his cleaver. My companion had just fetched a stout stick from where it had leaned against the wall. Several of them lofted small pieces of furniture.

More of them had emerged from the caves near the fire-pit, and they bore stones and clubs. All traces of gaiety had vanished, and their faces were now either expressionless, twisted into grimaces of hate, or smiling very nasty smiles.

My anger returned, but it was not the white-heat thing I had felt earlier. Looking at the horde before me, I had no wish to tackle it. Prudence had come to temper my feelings. I had a mission. I should not risk my neck here if I could think of another way of handling things. But I was certain that I could not talk my way out of this one.

I took a deep breath. I saw that they were getting ready to rush me, and I thought suddenly of Brand and Benedict in Tir-na Nog'th, Brand not even fully attuned to the Jewel. I drew strength from that fiery stone once again, growing alert and ready to lay about me if it came to that. But first I would have a go at their nervous systems.

I was not certain how Brand had managed it, so I simply reached out through the Jewel as I did when influencing the weather. Strangely, the music was still playing, as though this action of the little people was but some grisly continuation of their dance.

"Stand still." I said it aloud and willed it, rising to my feet. "Freeze. Turn to statues. All of you."

I felt a heavy throbbing within-upon my breast. I felt the red forces move outward, exactly as on those other occasions when I had employed the Jewel.

My dimunitive assailants were poised. The nearest ones stood stock-still, but there were still some movements among those to the rear. Then the pipes let out a crazy squeal and the fiddles fell silent. Still, I did not know whether I had reached them or whether they had halted of their own accord on seeing me stand.

Then I felt the great waves of force that flowed out from me,

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embedding the entire assembly in a tightening matrix. I felt them all trapped within this expression of my will, and I reached out and untethered Star.

Holding them with a concentration as pure as anything I used when passing through Shadow, I led Star to the doorway. I turned then for a final look at the frozen assembly and pushed Star on ahead of me up the stair. As I followed, I listened, but there were no sounds of renewed activity from below.

When we emerged, dawn was already paling the east. Strangely, as I mounted, I heard the distant sounds of fiddles. Moments later, the pipes came in on the tune. It seemed as though it mattered not at all whether they succeeded or failed in their designs against me; the party was going to go on.

As I headed us south, a small figure hailed me from the doorway I had so recently quitted. It was their leader, with whom I had been drinking. I drew rein, to better catch his words.

"And where do you travel?" he called after me.

Why not?

"To the ends of the Earth!" I shouted back.

He broke into a jig atop his shattered door.

"Fare thee well, Corwin!" he cried.

I waved to him. Why not, indeed? Sometimes it's damned hard to tell the dancer from the dance.

VI.

I RODE FEWER than a thousand meters to what had been the south, and everything stopped—ground, sky, mountains. I faced a sheet of white light. I thought then of the stranger in the cave and his words. He had felt that the world was being blotted out by that storm, that it corresponded to something out of a local apocalyptic legend. Perhaps it had. Perhaps it had been the wave of Chaos of which Brand had spoken, moving this way, passing over, destroying, disrupting. But this end of the valley was untouched. Why should it remain?

Then I recalled my actions on rushing out into the storm. I had used the Jewel, the power of the Pattern within it, to halt the storm over this area. And if it had been more than an ordinary storm? The Pattern had prevailed over Chaos before. Could this valley where I had stopped the rainfall be but a small island in a sea of Chaos now? If so, how was I to continue?

I looked to the east, from whence the day brightened. No sun stood new-risen in the heavens, but rather a great, blindingly burnished crown, a gleaming sword hanging through it. From somewhere I heard a bird singing, notes almost like laughter. I leaned forward and covered my face with my hands. Madness . . . .

No! I had been in weird shadows before. The farther one traveled, the stranger they sometimes grew. Un-

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til . . . . What was it I'd thought that night in Tir-na Nog'th?

Two lines from a story of Isak Dinesen's returned to me, lines that had troubled me sufficiently to cause me to memorize them, despite the fact that I had been Carl Corey at the time: "*. . . Few people can say of themselves that they are free of the belief that this world which they see around them is in reality the work of their own imagination. Are we pleased with it, proud of it, then?*"

A summation of the family's favorite philosophical pastime. Do we make the Shadow worlds? Or are they there, independent of us, awaiting our footfalls? Or is there an unfairly excluded middle? Is it a matter of more or less, rather than either-or? A dry chuckle arose suddenly as I realized that I might never know the answer for certain.

Yet, as I had thought that night, there is a place, a place where there comes an end to Self, a place where solipsism is no longer the plausible answer to the locales we visit, the things that we find. The existence of this place, these things, say that here, at least, there is a difference, and if here, perhaps it runs back through our shadows, too, informing them with the not-self, moving our egos back to a smaller stage.

For this, I felt, was such a place, a place where the "Are we pleased with it, proud of it then?" need not apply, as the rent vale of Garnath and my curse might have nearer home. Whatever I ultimately believed, I felt that I was about to enter the land of the completely not-I. My powers over Shadow might well be canceled beyond this point.

I sat up straight and squinted against the glare. I spoke a word to Star and shook the reins. We moved ahead.

For a moment, it was like riding into a fog. Only it was enormously brighter, and there was absolutely no sound. Then we were falling.

Falling, or drifting. After the initial shock, it was difficult to say. At first there was a feeling of descent—perhaps intensified by the fact that Star panicked when it began. But there was nothing to kick against, and after a time Star ceased all movement save for shivering and heavy breathing.

I held the reins with my right hand and clutched the Jewel with my left. I do not know what I willed or how I reached with it, exactly, but I wanted passage through this place of bright nothingness, to find my way once more and move on to the journey's end.

I lost track of time. The feeling of descent had vanished. Was I moving, or merely hovering? No way to say. Was the brightness really brightness, still? And that deadly silence . . . I shuddered. Here was even greater sensory deprivation than in the days of my blindness, in my old cell. Here was nothing—not the sound of a scut-

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tling rat nor the grinding of my spoon against the door; no dampness, no chill, no textures. I continued to reach . . . .

Flicker.

It seemed there had been some momentary breaking of the visual field to my right, near-subliminal in its brevity. I reached out and felt nothing.

It had been so brief a thing that I was uncertain whether it had really occurred. It could easily have been an hallucination.

But it seemed to happen again, this time to my left. How long the interval between, I could not say.

Then I heard something like a groan, directionless. This, too, was very brief.

Next—and for the first time, I was certain—there came a gray and white landscape like the surface of the moon. There and gone, perhaps a second's worth, in a small area of my visual field, off to my left. Star snorted.

To my right appeared a forest—gray and white—tumbling, as though we passed one another at some impossible angle. A small-screen fragment, less than two seconds' worth.

Then pieces of a burning building beneath me . . . colorless . . . .

Snatches of wailing, from overhead . . . . .

A ghostly mountain, a torchlit procession ascending a switchback trail up its nearest face . . . .

A woman hanging from a treelimb, taut rope about her neck, head twisted to the side, hands tied behind her back . . . .

Mountains, upside-down, white; black clouds beneath . . . .

Click. A tiny thrill of vibration, as if we had momentarily touched something solid—Star's hoof on stone, perhaps. Then gone . . . .

Flicker.

Heads, rolling, dripping black gore . . . a chuckle from nowhere . . . a man nailed to a wall, upside-down . . . .

The white light again, rolling and heaving, wave-like . . . .

Click. Flicker.

For one pulsebeat, we trod a trail beneath a stippled sky. The moment it was gone, I reached for it again, through the Jewel.

Click. Flicker. Click. Rumble.

A rocky trail, approaching a high mountain pass . . . . Still monochrome, the world . . . at my back, a crashing like thunder . . . .

I twisted the Jewel like a focus knob as the world began to fade. It came back again. . . . Two, three, four . . . I counted hoofbeats, heartbeats against the growling background . . . . Seven, eight, nine . . . the world grew brighter. I took a deep breath and sighed heavily. The air was cold.

Between the thunder and its echoes, I heard the sound of rain. None fell upon me, though.

I glanced back.

A great wall of rain stood perhaps a hundred meters to the

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rear. I could only distinguish the dimmest of mountain outlines through it. I clucked to Star and we moved a little faster, climbing to an almost level stretch that led between a pair of peaks like turrets. The world ahead was still a study in black and white and gray, the sky before me divided by alternate bands of darkness and light. We entered the pass.

I began to tremble. I wanted to draw rein, to rest, eat, smoke, dismount and walk around. Yet, I was still too close to that stormscreen to so indulge myself.

Star's hoofbeats echoed within the pass, where rock walls rose sheer on either hand beneath that zebra sky. I hoped these mountains would break this stormfront, though I felt that they could not. This was no ordinary storm, and I had a sick feeling that it stretched all the way back to Amber, and that I would have been trapped and lost forever within it but for the Jewel.

As I watched that strange sky, a blizzard of pale flowers began to fall about me, brightening my way. A pleasant odor filled the air. The thunder at my back softened. The rocks at my sides were shot with silver streaks. The world was possessed of a twilight feeling to match the illumination, and as I emerged from the pass, I saw down into a valley of quirked perspective, distances impossible to gauge, filled with natural-seeming spires and minarets reflecting the moonlike light of the sky-streaks, reminiscent of a night in Tir-na Nog'th, interspersed with silvery trees, spotted with mirror-like pools, traversed by drifting wraiths, almost terraced-seeming in places, natural nad rolling in others, cut by what appeared to be an extension of the line of trail I followed, rising and falling, hung over by an elegiac quality, sparked with inexplicable points of glitter and shine, devoid of any signs of habitation.

I did not hesitate, but began my descent. The ground about me here was chalky and pale as bone—and was that the faintest line of a black road far off to my left? I could just about make it out.

I did not hurry now, as I could see that Star was tiring. If the storm did not come on too quickly, I felt that we might take a rest beside one of the pools in the valley below. I was tired and hungry myself.

I kept a lookout on the way down, but saw no people, no animals. The wind made a soft, sighing noise. White flowers stirred on vines beside the trail when I reached the lower levels where regular foliage began. Looking back, I saw that the stormfront still had not passed the mountain crest, though the clouds continued to pile behind it.

I made my way on down into that strange place. The flowers had long before ceased to fall about me, but a delicate perfume hung in the air. There were no sounds other than

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our own and that of the constant breeze from my right. Oddly shaped rock formations stood all about me, seeming almost sculpted in their purity of line. The mists still drifted. The pale grasses sparkled damply.

As I followed the trail toward the valley's wooded center, the perspectives continued to shift about me, skewing distances, bending prospects. In fact, I turned off the trail to the left to approach what appeared to be a nearby lake and it seemed to recede as I advanced. When I finally came upon it, however, dismounted and dipped a finger to taste, the water was icy but sweet.

Tired, I sprawled after drinking my fill, to watch Star graze while I began a cold meal from my bag. The storm was still fighting to cross the mountains. I looked for a long while, wondering about it. If Dad had failed, then those were the growls of Armageddon and this whole trip was meaningless. It did me no good to think that way, for I knew that I had to go on, whatever. But I could not help it. I might arrive at my destination, I might see the battle won, and then see it all swept away. Pointless . . . . No. Not pointless. I would have tried, and I would keep on trying to the end. That was enough, even if everything was lost. Damn Brand, anyway! For starting—

A footfall.

I was into a crouch and I was turned in that direction with my hand on my blade in an instant.

It was a woman that I faced, small, clad in white. She had long, dark hair and wild, dark eyes, and she was smiling. She carried a wicker basket which she placed on the ground between us.

"You must be hungry, Knight at arms," she said in strangely accented Thari. "I saw you come. I brought you this."

I smiled and assumed a more normal stance.

"Thank you," I said. "I am. I am called Corwin. Yourself?"

"Lady," she said.

I quirked an eyebrow. "Thank you—Lady. You make your home in this place?"

She nodded and knelt to uncover the basket.

"Yes, my pavilion is farther back, along the lake." She gestured with her head, eastward—in the direction of the black road.

"I see," I said.

The food and the wine in the basket looked real, fresh, appetizing, better than my traveler's fare. Suspicion was with me, of course. "You will share it with me?" I asked.

"If you wish."

"I wish."

"Very well."

She spread a cloth, seated herself across from me, removed the food from the basket and arranged it between us. She served it then, and quickly sampled each item herself. I

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felt a trifle ignoble at this, but only a trifle. It was a peculiar location for a woman to be residing, apparently alone, just waiting around to succor the first stranger who happened along. Dara had fed me on our first meeting, also; and as I might be nearing the end of my journey, I was closer to the enemy's places of power. The black road was too near at hand, and I caught Lady eyeing the Jewel on several occasions.

But it was an enjoyable time, and we grew more familiar as we dined. She was an ideal audience, laughing at all my jokes, making me talk about myself. She maintained eye contact much of the time, and somehow our fingers met whenever anything was passed. If I were being taken in in some way, she was being very pleasant about it.

As we had dined and talked, I had also kept an eye on the progress of that inexorable-seeming storm-front. It had finally breasted the mountain crest and crossed over. It had begun its slow descent of the high slope. As she cleared the cloth, Lady saw the direction of my gaze and nodded.

"Yes, it is coming," she said, placing the last of the utensils in the basket and seating herself beside me, bringing the bottle and our cups. "Shall we drink to it?"

"I will drink with you, but not to that."

She poured.

"It does not matter," she said. "Not now," and she placed her hand on my arm and passed me my cup.

I held it and looked down at her. She smiled. She touched the rim of my cup with her own. We drank.

"Come to my pavilion now," she said, taking my hand, "where we will while pleasurably the hours that remain."

"Thanks," I said. "Another time and that whiling would have been a fine dessert to a grand meal. Unfortunately, I must be on my way. Duty nags, times rushes, I've a mission."

"All right," she said. "It is not that important. And I know all about your mission. It is not all that important either, now."

"Oh? I must confess that I fully expected you to invite me to a private party that would result in me alone and palely loitering on the cold side of some hill sometime hence if I were to accept."

She laughed.

"And I must confess that it was my intention to so use you, Corwin. No longer, though."

"Why not?"

She gestured toward the advancing line of disruption.

"There is no need to delay you now. I see by this that the Courts have won. There is nothing anyone can do to halt the advance of the Chaos."

I shuddered briefly and she refilled our cups.

"But I would rather you did not

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leave me at this time," she went on. "It will reach us here in a matter of hours. What better way to spend this final time than in one another's company? There is no need even to go as far as my pavilion."

I bowed my head, and she drew up close against me. What the hell. A woman and a bottle—that was how I had always said I wanted to end my days. I took a sip of the wine.

She was probably right. Yet, I thought of the woman-thing that had trapped me on the black road as I was leaving Avalon. I had gone at first to aid her, succumbed quickly to her unnatural charms—then, when her mask was removed, saw that there was nothing at all behind it. Damned frightening, at the time. But, not to get too philosophical, everybody has a whole rack of masks for different occasions. I have heard pop psychologists inveigh against them for years. Still, I have met people who impressed me favorably at first, people whom I came to hate when I learned what they were like underneath. And sometimes they were like that woman-thing—with nothing much really there. I have found that the mask is often far more acceptable than its alternative. So . . . this girl I held to me might really be a monster inside. Probably was. Aren't most of us? I could think of worse ways to go if I wanted to give up at this point. I liked her.

I finished my wine. She moved to pour me more and I stayed her hand.

She looked up at me. I smiled.

"You almost persuaded me," I said.

Then I closed her eyes with kisses four, so as not to break the charm, and I went and mounted Star. The sedge was not withered, but he was right about the no birds. Hell of a way to run a railroad, though.

"Good-bye, Lady."

* * *

I headed south as the storm boiled its way down into the valley. There were more mountains before me, and the trail led toward them. The sky was still streaked, black and white, and these lines seemed to move about a bit; the overall effect was still that of twilight, though no stars shone within the black areas. Still the breeze, still the perfume about me—and the silence, and the twisted monoliths and the silvery foliage, still dew-damp and glistening. Rag-ends of mist blew before me. I tried to work with the stuff of Shadow, but it was difficult and I was tired. Nothing happened. I drew strength from the Jewel, trying to transmit some of it to Star, also. We moved at a steady pace until finally the land tilted upward before us, and we were climbing toward another pass, a more jagged thing than the

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one by which we had entered. I halted to look back, and perhaps a third of the valley now lay behind the shimmering screen of that advancing storm-thing. I wondered about Lady, her lake, her pavilion. I shook my head and continued on.

The way steepened as we neared the pass, and we were slowed. Overhead, the white rivers in the sky took on a reddish cast that deepened as we rode. By the time that I reached the entrance, the whole world seemed tinged with blood. Passing within that wide, rocky avenue, I was struck by a heavy wind. Pushing on against it, the ground grew more level beneath us, though we continued to climb and I still could not see beyond the pass.

As I rode, something rattled in the rocks to my left. I glanced that way, but saw nothing. I dismissed it as a falling stone. Half a minute later, Star jerked beneath me, let out a terrible neigh, turned sharply to the right, then began to topple, leftward.

I leaped clear, and as we both fell, I saw that an arrow protruded from behind Star's right shoulder, low. I hit the ground rolling, and when I halted, I looked up in the direction from which it must have come.

A figure with a crossbow stood atop the ridge to my right, about ten meters above me. He was already cranking the weapon back to prepare for another shot.

I knew that I could not reach him in time to stop him. So I cast about for a stone the size of a baseball, found one at the foot of the escarpment to my rear, hefted it and tried not to let my rage interfere with the accuracy of my throw. It did not, but it may have contributed some extra force.

The blow caught him on the left arm, and he let out a cry, dropping the crossbow. The weapon clattered down the rocks and landed on the other side of the trail, almost directly across from me.

"You son of a bitch!" I cried. "You killed my horse! I'm going to have your head for it!"

As I crossed the trail, I looked for the fastest way up to him and saw it off to my left. I hurried to it and commenced climbing. An instant later, the light and the angle were proper and I had a better view of the man, bent nearly double, massaging his arm. It was Brand, his hair even redder in the sanguine light.

"This is it, Brand," I said. "I only wish someone had done it a long time ago."

He straightened and watched me climb for a moment. He did not reach for his blade. Just as I got to the top, perhaps seven meters away from him, he crossed his arms on his breast and lowered his head.

I drew Grayswandir and advanced. I admit that I was prepared to kill him in that or any other position. The red light had deepened

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until we seemed bathed in blood. The wind howled about us, and from the valley below came a rumble of thunder.

He simply faded before me. His outline grew less distinct, and by the time I reached the place where he had been standing, he had vanished entirely.

I stood for a moment, cursing, remembering the story that he had somehow been transformed into a living Trump, capable of transporting himself anywhere in a very brief time.

I heard a noise from below . . . .

I rushed to the edge and looked down. Star was still kicking and blowing blood, and it tore my heart to see it. But that was not the only distressing sight.

Brand was below. He had picked up the crossbow and begun preparing it once more.

I looked about for another stone, but there was nothing at hand. Then I spotted one farther back, in the direction from which I had come. I hurried to it, resheathed my blade and raised the thing. It was about the size of a watermelon. I returned with it to the edge and sought Brand.

He was nowhere in sight.

Suddenly I felt very exposed. He could have transported himself to any vantage and be sighting in on me at that instant. I dropped to the ground, falling across my rock. A moment later I heard the bolt strike to my right. The sound was followed by Brand's chuckle.

I stood again, knowing it would take him at least a little while to recock his weapon. Looking in the direction of the laughter, I saw him, atop the ledge across the pass from me—about five meters higher than I and about twenty meters distant.

"Sorry about the horse," he said. I was aiming for you. But those damned winds . . . ."

By then I had spotted a niche and I made for it, taking the rock with me for a shield. From that wedge-shaped fissure, I watched him fit the bolt.

"A difficult shot," he called out, raising the weapon, "a challenge to my marksmanship. But certainly worth the effort. I've plenty more quarrels."

He chuckled, sighted and fired.

I bent low, holding the rock before my middle, but the bolt struck about two feet to my right.

"I had sort of guessed that might happen," he said, beginning to prepare his weapon once again. "Had to learn the windage, though."

I looked about for smaller stones to use for ammunition as I had earlier.

There were none nearby. I wondered about the Jewel then. It was supposed to act to save me in the presence of immediate peril. But I had a funny feeling that this involved close proximity, and that Brand was aware of this and was taking advantage of the phenomenon. Still, mightn't there be some-

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thing else I could do with the Jewel to thwart him? He seemed too far away for the paralysis trick, but I had beaten him once before by controlling the weather. I wondered how far off the storm was. I reached for it. I saw that it would take minutes I did not possess in order to set up the conditions necessary to draw lightning upon him. But the winds were another matter. I reached out for them, felt them . . . .

Brand was almost ready to shoot again. The wind began to scream through the pass.

I do not know where his next shot landed. Nowhere near me, though. He fell to readying his weapon again. I began setting up the factors for a lightningstroke . . . .

When he was ready, when he raised the weapon this time, I raised the winds once more. I saw him sight, I saw him draw a breath and hold it. Then he lowered the bow and stared at me.

"It just occurred to me," he called out, "you've got that wind in your pocket, haven't you? That is cheating, Corwin." He looked all about. "I should be able to find a footing where it will not matter, though. Aha!"

I kept working to set things up to blast him, but conditions were not ready yet. I looked up at that red- and black-streaked sky, something cloud-like forming above us. Soon, but not yet . . . .

Brand faded and vanished again. Wildly I sought him everywhere.

Then he faced me. He had come over to my side of the pass. He stood about ten meters to the south of me, with the wind at his back. I knew that I could not shift it in time. I wondered about throwing my rock. He would probably duck and I would be throwing away my shield. On the other hand . . . .

He raised the weapon to his shoulder.

Stall! cried my own voice within my mind, while I continued to tamper with the heavens.

"Before you shoot, Brand, tell me one thing. All right?"

He hesitated, then lowered the weapon a few inches.

"What?"

"Were you telling me the truth about what happened—with Dad, the Pattern, the coming of Chaos?"

He threw back his head and laughed, a series of short barks.

"Corwin," he stated then, "it pleases me more than I can say to see you die not knowing something that means that much to you."

He laughed again and began to raise the weapon. I had just moved to hurl my rock and rush him. But neither of us completed either action.

There came a great shriek from overhead, and a piece of the sky seemed to detach itself and fall upon Brand's head. He screamed and dropped the crossbow. He raised his hands to tear at the thing that assailed him. The red bird, the

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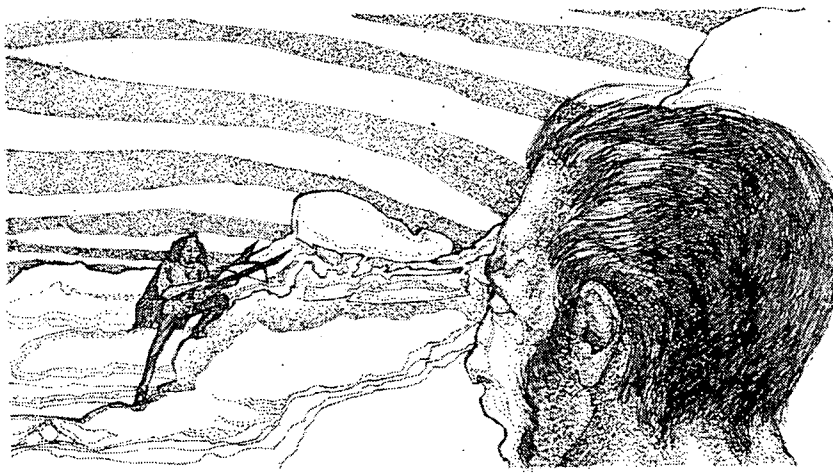

Jewel-bearer, born of my blood from my father's hand, had returned, to defend me.

I let go the rock and advanced upon him, drawing my blade as I went. Brand struck the bird and it flapped away, gaining altitude, circling for another dive. He raised both arms to cover his face and head, but not before I saw the blood that flowed from his left eyesocket.

He began to fade again even as I rushed toward him. But the bird descended like a bomb and its talons struck Brand about the head once again. Then the bird, too, began to fade. Brand was reaching for his ruddy assailant and being slashed by it as they both disappeared.

When I reached the place of the action, the only thing that remained was the fallen crossbow, and I smashed it with my boot.

Not yet, not yet the end, damn it! How long will you plague me, brother? How far must I go to bring it to an end between us?

I climbed back down to the trail. Star was not yet dead and I had to finish the job. Sometimes I think I'm in the wrong business.

VII.

A BOWL OF COTTON CANDY.

Having traversed the pass, I regarded the valley that lay before me. At least I assumed that it was a valley. I could see nothing below its cover of cloud/mist/fog.

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In the sky, one of the red streaks was turning yellow; another, green. I was slightly heartened by this, as the sky had behaved in a somewhat similar fashion when I had visited the edge of things, across from the Courts of Chaos.

I hitched up my pack and began hiking down the trail. The winds diminished as I went. Distantly, I heard some thunder from the storm I was fleeing. I wondered where Brand had gone. I had a feeling that I would not be seeing him again for a time.

Partway down, with the fog just beginning to creep and curl about me, I spotted an ancient tree and cut myself a staff. The tree seemed to shriek as I severed its limb.

"Damn you!" came something like a voice from within it.

"You're sentient?" I said. "I'm sorry . . . ."

"I spent a long time growing that branch. I suppose you are going to burn it now?"

"No," I said. "I needed a staff. I've a long walk before me."

"Through this valley?"

"That's right."

"Come closer, that I may better sense your presence. There is something about you that glows."

I took a step forward.

"Oberon!" it said: "I know thy Jewel."

"Not Oberon," I said. "I am his son. I wear it on his mission, though."

"Then take my limb, and have my blessing with it. I've sheltered your father on many a strange day. He planted me, you see."

"Really? Planting a tree is one of the few things I never saw Dad do."

"I am no ordinary tree. He placed me here to mark a boundary."

"Of what sort?"

"I am the end of Chaos and of Order, depending upon how you view me. I mark a division. Beyond me other rules apply."

"What rules?"

"Who can say? Not I. I am only a growing tower of sentient lumber. My staff may comfort you, however. Planted, it may blossom in strange climes. Then again, it may not. Who can say? Bear it with you, however, son of Oberon, into the place where you journey now. I feel a storm approaching. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," I said. "Thank you."

I turned and walked on down the trail into the deepening fog. The pinkness was drained from it as I went. I shook my head as I thought about the tree, but its staff proved useful for the next several hundred meters, where the going was particularly rough.

Then things cleared a bit. Rocks, a stagnant pool, some small, dreary trees festooned with ropes of moss, a smell of decay . . . I hurried by. A dark bird was watching me from one of the trees.

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It took wing as I regarded it, flapping in a leisurely fashion in my direction. Recent events having left me a little bird-shy, I drew back as it circled my head. But then it fluttered to rest on the trail before me, cocked its head and viewed me with its left eye.

"Yes," it announced then. "You are the one."

"The one what?" I said.

"The one I will accompany. You've no objection to a bird of ill-omen following you, have you, Corwin?"

It chuckled then, and executed a little dance.

"Offhand, I do not see how I can stop you. How is it that you know my name?"

"I've been waiting for you since the beginning of Time, Corwin."

"Must have been a bit tiresome."

"It has not been all that long, in this place. Time is what you make of it."

I resumed walking. I passed the bird and kept going. Moments later, it flashed by me and landed atop a rock off to my right.

"My name is Hugi," he stated. "You are carrying a piece of old Ygg, I see."

"Ygg?"

"The stuffy old tree who waits at the entrance to this place and won't let anyone rest on his branches. I'll bet he yelled when you whacked it off." He emitted peals of laughter then.

"He was quite decent about it."

"I'll bet. But then, he hadn't much choice once you'd done it. Fat lot of good it will do you."

"It's doing me fine," I said swinging it lightly in his direction.

He fluttered away from it.

"Hey! That was not funny!"

I laughed.

"I thought it was."

I walked on by.

For a long while I made my way through a marshy area. As occasional gust of wind would clear the way nearby. Then I would pass it, or the fogs would shift over it once again.

Occasionally I seemed to hear a snatch of music—from what direction, I could not tell—slow, and somewhat stately, produced by a steel-stringed instrument.

As I slogged along, I was hailed from somewhere to my left:

"Stranger! Halt and regard me!"

Wary, I halted. Couldn't see a damned thing through that fog though.

"Hello," I said. "Where are you?"

Just then the fogs broke for a moment and I beheld a huge head, eyes on a level with my own. They belonged to what seemed a giant body, sunk up to the shoulders in a quag. The head was bald, the skin pale as milk, with a stony texture to it. The dark eyes probably seemed even darker than they really were by way of contrast.

"I see," I said then. "You are in

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a bit of a fix. Can you free your arms?''

''If I strain mightily,'' came the reply.

''Well, let me check about for something stable you can grab onto. You ought to have a pretty good reach there.''

''No. That is not necessary.''

''Don't you want to get out? I thought that was why you hollered.''

''Oh, no. I simply wanted you to regard me.''

I moved nearer and started, for the fog was beginning to shift again.

''All right,'' I said. ''I have seen you.''

''Do you feel my plight?''

''Not particularly, if you will not help yourself or accept help.''

''What good would it do me to free myself?''

''Your question. You answer it.''

I turned to go.

''Wait! Where do you travel?''

''South, to appear in a morality play.''

Just then Hugi flew out of the fog and landed atop the head. He pecked at it and laughed.

''Don't waste your time, Corwin. There is much less here than meets the eye,'' he said.

The giant lips shaped my name. Then, ''He is indeed the one?''

''That's him, all right,'' Hugi replied.

''Listen, Corwin,'' said the sunken giant. ''You are going to try to stop the Chaos, aren't you?''

''Yes.''

''Do not do it. It is not worth it. I want things to end. I desire a release from this condition.''

''I already offered to help you out. You turned me down.''

''Not that sort of release. An end to the whole works.''

''That is easily done,'' I said. ''Just duck your head and take a deep breath.''

''It is not only personal termination that I desire, but an end to the whole foolish game.''

''I believe there are a few other folks around who would rather make their own decisions on the matter.''

''Let it end for them, too. There will come a time when they are in my position and will feel the same way.''

''Then they will possess the same option. Good day.''

I turned and walked on.

''You will, too!'' he called after me.

As I hiked along, Hugi caught up with me and perched on the end of my staff.

''It's neat to sit on old Ygg's limb now he can't—Yikes!''

Hugi sprang into the air and circled.

''Burned my foot! How'd he do that?'' he cried.

I laughed.

''Beats me.''

He fluttered for a few moments, then made for my right shoulder.

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"Okay if I rest here?"

"Go ahead."

"Thanks." He settled. "The Head is really a mental basket case, you know."

I shrugged my shoulders and he spread his wings for balance.

"He is groping after something," he went on, "but proceeding incorrectly by holding the world responsible for his own failings."

"No. He would not even grope to get out of the mud," I said.

"I meant philosophically."

"Oh, that sort of mud. Too bad."

"The whole problem lies with the self, the ego, and its involvement with the world on the one hand and the Absolute on the other."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Yes. You see, we are hatched and we drift on the surface of events. Sometimes we feel that we actually influence things, and this gives rise to striving. This is a big mistake, because it creates desires and builds up a false ego when just being should be enough. That leads to more desires and more striving and there you are, trapped."

"In the mud?"

"So to speak. One needs to fix one's vision firmly on the Absolute and learn to ignore the mirages, the illusions, the fake sense of identity that sets one apart as a false island of consciousness."

"I had a fake identity once. It helped me a lot in becoming the absolute that I am now: me."

"No, that's fake, too."

"Then the me that may exist tomorrow will thank me for it, as I do that other."

"You are missing the point. That you will be fake, too."

"Why?"

"Because it will still be full of those desires and strivings that set you apart from the Absolute."

"What is wrong with that?"

"You remain alone in a world of strangers, the world of phenomena."

"I like being alone. I am quite fond of myself. I like phenomena, too."

"Yet the Absolute will always be there, calling to you, causing unrest."

"Good, then there is no need to hurry. But yes, I see what you mean. It takes the form of ideals. Everyone has a few. If you are saying that I should pursue them, I agree with you."

"No, they are distortions of the Absolute, and what you are talking about is more striving."

"That is correct,"

"I can see that you have a lot to unlearn."

"If you are talking about my vulgar instinct for survival, forget it."

The trail had been leading upward, and we came now to a smooth, level place, almost paved-seeming, though strewn lightly with sand. The music had grown louder and continued to do so as I advanced. Then, through the fog, I

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saw dim shapes moving, slowly, rhythmically. It took several moments for me to realize that they were dancing to the music.

I kept moving until I could view the figures—human-seeming, handsome folk, garbed in courtly attire—treading to the slow measures of invisible musicians. It was an intricate and lovely dance that they executed, and I halted to watch some of it.

"What is the occasion," I asked Hugi, "for a party out here in the middle of nowhere?"

"They dance," he said, "to celebrate your passage. They are not mortals, but the spirits of Time. They began this foolish show when you entered the valley."

"Spirits?"

"Yes. Observe."

He left my shoulder, flew above them and defecated. The dropping passed through several dancers as if they were holograms, without staining a brocaded sleeve or a silken shirt, without causing any of the smiling figures to miss a measure. Hugi cawed several times then and flew back to me.

"That was hardly necessary," I said. "It is a fine performance."

"Decadent," he said, "and you should hardly take it as a compliment, for they anticipate your failure. They but wish to get in a final celebration before the show is closed."

I watched for a time anyway, leaning upon my staff, resting. The figure described by the dancers slowly shifted, until one of the women—an auburn-haired beauty—was quite near to me. Now, none of the dancers' eyes at any time met my own. It was as if I were not present. But that woman, in a perfectly timed gesture, cast with her right hand something that landed at my feet.

I stooped and found it substantial. It was a silver rose—my own emblem—that I held. I straightened and fixed it at the collar of my cloak. Hugi looked the other way and said nothing. I had no hat to doff, but I did bow to the lady. There might have been a slight twitch of one eye as I turned to go.

The ground lost its smoothness as I walked, and finally the music faded. The trail grew rougher, and whenever the fogs cleared, the only views were of rocks or barren plains. I drew strength from the Jewel when I would otherwise have collapsed, and I noted that each such fix was of shorter duration now.

After a time I grew hungry and I halted to eat what rations I had left.

Hugi stood on the ground nearby and watched me eat.

"I will admit to a certain small admiration for your persistence," he said, "and even for what you implied when you spoke of ideals. But that is about it. Earlier we were talking about the futility of desire and of striving—"

"You were. It is not a major

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concern in my life."

"It should be."

"I have had a long life, Hugi. You insult me by assuming I have never considered these footnotes to Sophomore philosophy. The fact that you find concensus reality barren tells me more about you than it does about that state of affairs. To wit, if you believe what you say, I feel sorry for you, in that you must for some inexplicable reason be here, desiring and striving to influence this false ego of mine, rather than free of such nonsense and on your way to your Absolute. If you do not believe it, then it tells me that you have been set to hinder and discourage me, in which case you are wasting your time."

Hugi made a gargling noise. Then, "You are not so blind that you deny the Absolute, the beginning and end of everything?"

"It is not indispensable to a liberal education."

"You admit the possibility?"

"Perhaps I know it better than you, bird. The ego, as I see it, exists at an intermediate stage between rationality and reflex existence. Blotting is out is a retreat, though. If you come from that Absolute—of a self-canceling All—why do you wish to go back home? Do you so despise yourself that you fear mirrors? Why not make the trip worthwhile? Develop. Learn. Live. If you have been sent on a journey, why do you wish to cop out and run back to your point of departure? Or did your Absolute make a mistake in sending something of your caliber? Admit that possibility and that is the end of the news."

Hugi glared at me, then sprang into the air and flew off. Going to consult his manual, perhaps . . . .

I heard a peal of thunder as I rose to my feet. I began walking. I had to try to keep ahead of things.

The trail narrowed and widened a number of times before it vanished completely, leaving me to wander across a gravelly plain. I felt more and more depressed as I traveled, trying to keep my mental compass set in the proper direction. I almost came to welcome the sounds of the storm, for they at least gave me a rough idea as to which way was north. Of course things were a bit confusing in the fog, so that I could not be absolutely certain. And they were growing louder . . . . Damn.

. . . And I had been grieved by the loss of Star, troubled by Hugi's futilitarianism. This was definitely not a good day. I began to doubt that I was going to complete my journey. If some nameless denizen of this dark place did not ambush me before too long, there was a strong possibility that I would wander here until my strength failed or the storm caught me. I did not know whether I would be able to beat back that canceling storm another time. I began to doubt it.

I tried using the Jewel to disperse the fog, but its effects seemed blunted. By my own sluggishness,

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perhaps. I could clear a small area, but my rate of travel quickly bore me through it. My sense of Shadow was dulled in this place which seemed in some way the essence of Shadow.

Sad. It would have been nice to go out with opera—in a big Wagnerian finale beneath strange skies, against worthy opponents—not scrabbling about in a foggy wasteland.

I passed a familiar-seeming outcrop of stone. Could I have been moving in a circle? There is a tendency to do that when completely lost. I listened for the thunder, to take my bearings again. Perversely, all was silent. I moved to the outcrop and seated myself on the ground, resting my back against it. No sense to merely wandering. I would wait a time for the thunder's signal. I withdrew my Trumps as I sat there. Dad had said that they would be out of commission for a time, but I had nothing better to do.

One by one, I went through them all, trying to reach everyone, save for Brand and Caine. Nothing. Dad had been right. The cards lacked the familiar coldness. I shuffled the entire deck then and cast my fortune, there on the sand. I got an impossible reading and put them all away again. I leaned back and wished I had some water left. For a long while, I listened for the storm. There were a few growls, but they were directionless. The Trumps made me think of my family. They were up ahead—wherever that might be—waiting for me. Waiting for what? I was transporting the Jewel. To what end? At first I had assumed that its powers might be necessary in the conflict. If so, and if I were indeed the only one who could employ them, then we were in bad shape. I thought of Amber then, and I was shaken with remorse and a kind of dread. Things must not end for Amber, ever. There had to be a way to roll back the Chaos . . . .

I threw away a small stone I had been toying with. Once I released it, it moved very slowly.

The Jewel. Its slowdown effect again . . . .

I drew more energy and the stone shot away. It seemed that I had just taken strength from the Jewel a little while ago. While this treatment energized my body, my mind still felt fogged up. I needed sleep—with lots of rapid eye movements. This place might seem a lot less unusual if I were rested.

How close was I to my destination? Was it just beyond the next mountain range, or an enormous distance farther? And what chance had I of staying ahead of that storm, no matter what the distance? And the others? Supposing the battle was already concluded and we had lost? I had visions of arriving too late, to serve only as gravedigger . . . . Bones and soliloquies, Chaos . . . .

And where was that damned

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black road now that I finally had a use for it? If I could locate it, I could follow it. I had a feeling that it was somewhere off to my left . . . .

I reached out once again, parting the fogs, rolling them back . . . nothing . . . .

A shape? Something moving?

It was an animal, a large dog perhaps, moving to remain within the fog. Was it stalking me?

The Jewel began to pulse as I moved the fog even farther back. Exposed, the animal seemed to shrug itself. Then it moved straight toward me.

VIII.

I STOOD AS IT came near. I could see then that it was a jackal, a big one, its eyes fixed on my own.

"You are a little early," I said. "I was only resting."

It chuckled.

"I have come merely to regard a Prince of Amber," the beast said. "Anything else would be a bonus."

It chuckled again. So did I.

"Then feast your eyes. Anything else, and you will find that I have rested sufficiently."

"Nay, nay," said the jackal. "I am a fan of the House of Amber. And that of Chaos. Royal blood appeals to me, Prince of Chaos. And conflict."

"You have awarded me an unfamiliar title. My connection with the Courts of Chaos is mainly a matter of genealogy."

"I think of the images of Amber passing through the shadows of Chaos. I think of the waves of Chaos washing over the images of Amber. Yet at the heart of the order Amber represents moves a family most chaotic, just as the House of Chaos is serene and placid. Yet you have your ties, as well as your conflicts."

"At the moment," I said, "I am not interested in paradox-hunting and terminology games. I am trying to get to the Courts of Chaos. Do you know the way?"

"Yes," said the jackal. "It is not far, as the carrion-bird flies. Come, I will set you in the proper direction."

It turned and began walking away. I followed.

"Do I move too fast? You seem tired."

"No. Keep going. It is beyond this valley certainly, is it not?"

"Yes. There is a tunnel."

I followed it, out across sand and gravel and dry, hard ground. There was nothing growing at either hand. As we walked, the fogs thinned and took on a greenish cast—another trick of that stippled sky, I assumed.

After a time, I called out, "How much farther is it?"

"Not too far now," it said. "Do you grow tired? Do you wish to rest?"

It looked back as it spoke. The greenish light gave to its ugly fea-

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tures an even more ghastly cast. Still, I needed a guide; and we were heading uphill, which seemed to be proper.

"Is there water anywhere near about?" I asked.

"No. We would have to backtrack a considerable distance."

"Forget it. I haven't the time."

It shrugged and chuckled and continued on. The fog cleared a little more as we went, and I could see that we were entering a low range of hills. I leaned on my staff and kept up the pace. We climbed steadily for perhaps half an hour, the ground growing stonier, the angle of ascent steeper. I found myself beginning to breathe heavily.

"Wait," I called to him. "I do want to rest now. I thought you said that it was not far."

"Forgive me," it said, halting, "for jackalocentrism. I was judging in terms of my own natural pace. I erred in this, but we *are* almost there now. It lies among the rocks just ahead. Why not rest there?"

"All right," I replied, and I resumed walking.

Soon we reached a stony wall which I realized was the foot of a mountain. We picked our way among the rocky debris that lined it and came at last to an opening which led back into darkness.

"There you have it," said the jackal. "The way is straight, and there are no troublesome side branches. Take your passage through, and good speed to you."

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"Thank you," I said, giving up thoughts of rest for the moment and stepping inside. "I appreciate this."

"My pleasure," he said from behind me.

I took several more steps and something crunched beneath my feet and rattled when kicked aside. It was a sound one does not readily forget. The floor was strewn with bones.

There came a soft, quick sound from behind me, and I knew that I did not have time to draw Grayswandir. So I spun, raising my staff before me and thrusting with it.

This maneuver blocked the beast's leap, striking it on the shoulder. But it also knocked me over backward, to roll among the bones. The staff was torn from my hands by the impact, and in the split-second of decision allowed me by my opponent's own fall, I chose to draw Grayswandir rather than grope after it.

I managed to get my blade unsheathed, but that was all. I was still on my back with the point of my weapon to my left when the jackal recovered and leaped again. I swung the pommel with all of my strength into its face.

The shock ran down my arm and up into my shoulder. The jackal's head snapped back and its body twisted to my left. I brought the point into line immediately, gripping the hilt with both hands, and I was able to rise to my right knee before it snarled and lunged again.

As soon as I saw that I had it on target, I threw my weight behind it as we met, driving the blade deep into the jackal's body. I released it quickly and rolled away from those snapping jaws.

The jackal shrieked, struggled to rise, dropped back. I lay panting where I had fallen. I felt the staff beneath me and seized it. I brought it around to guard and drew myself back against the cave wall. The beast did not rise again, however, but lay there thrashing. In the dim light I could see that it was vomiting. The smell was overpowering.

Then it turned its eyes in my direction and lay still.

"It would have been so fine," it said softly, "to eat a Prince of Amber. I always wondered about royal blood . . . ."

Then the eyes closed and the breathing stopped and I was left with the stink.

I rose, back still against the wall, staff still before me, and regarded it. It was a long while before I could bring myself to retrieve my blade.

A quick exploration showed me that I was in no tunnel, but only a cave. When I made my way out, the fog had grown yellow, and it was stirred now by a breeze from the lower reaches of the valley.

I leaned against the rock and tried to decide which way to take. There was no real trail here.

Finally, I struck off to my left. That way seemed somewhat steeper,

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and I wanted to get above the fog and into the mountains as soon as I could. The staff continued to serve me well. I kept listening for the sound of running water, but there was none about.

I struggled along, always continuing upward, and the fogs thinned and changed color. Finally, I could see that I was climbing toward a wide plateau. Above it, I began to catch glimpses of the sky, many-colored and churning.

There were several sharp claps of thunder at my back, but I still could not see the disposition of the storm. I increased my pace then, but began to grow dizzy after a few minutes. I stopped and seated myself on the ground, panting. I was overwhelmed with a sense of failure. Even if I made it up to the plateau, I had a feeling that the storm would roar right across it. I rubbed my eyes with the heels of my hands. What was the use of going on if there was no way I could make it?

A shadow moved through the pistachio mists, dropped toward me. I raised my staff, then saw that it was only Hugi. He braked himself and landed at my feet.

"Corwin," he said, "you have come a good distance."

"But maybe not good enough," I said. "The storm seems to be getting nearer."

"I believe that it is. I have been meditating and would like to give you the benefit of—"

"If you want to benefit me at all," I said, "I could tell you what to do."

"What is that?"

"Fly back and see how far off the storm really is, and how fast it seems to be moving. Then come and tell me."

Hugi hopped from one foot to the other. Then, "All right," he said, and leaped into the air and batted his way toward what I felt to be the northwest.

I leaned on the staff and rose. I might as well keep climbing at the best pace I could manage. I drew upon the Jewel again, and strength came into me like a red lightning flash.

As I mounted the slope, a damp breeze sprang up from the direction in which Hugi had departed. There came another thunderclap. No more growls and rumbles.

I made the most of the influx of energy, climbing quickly and efficiently for several hundred meters. If I were going to lose, I might as well make it to the top first. I might as well see where I was and learn whether there was anything at all left for me to try.

My view of the sky grew more and more clear as I climbed. It had changed considerably since last I had regarded it. Half of it was of uninterrupted blackness and the other half those masses of swimming colors. And the entire heavenly bowl seemed to be rotating about a point directly overhead. I began to grow excited. This was

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the sky I was seeking, the sky that had covered me that time I had journeyed to Chaos. I struggled higher. I wanted to utter something heartening, but my throat was too dry.

As I neared the rim of the plateau, I heard a flapping sound and Hugi was suddenly on my shoulder.

"The storm is about ready to crawl up your arse," he said. "Be here any minute."

I continued climbing, reached level ground and hauled myself up to it. I stood for a moment then, breathing heavily. The wind must have kept the area clear of fog, for it was a high, smooth plain, and I could see the sky for a great distance ahead. I advanced, to find a point from which I could see beyond the farther edge. As I moved, the sounds of the storm came to me more clearly.

"I do not believe you will make it across," Hugi said, "without getting wet."

"You know that is no ordinary storm," I croaked. "If it were, I'd be thankful for the chance of getting a drink."

"I know. I was speaking figuratively."

I growled something vulgar and kept going.

Gradually the vista before me enlarged. The sky still did its crazy veil dance, but the illumination was more than sufficient. When I reached a position where I was positive what lay before me, I halted and sagged against my staff.

"What is the matter?" Hugi asked.

But I could not speak. I simply gestured at the great wasteland which commenced somewhere below the farther lip of the plateau to sweep on for at least forty miles before butting up against another range of mountains. And far off to the left and still running strong went the black road.

"The waste?" he said. "I could have told you it was there. Why didn't you ask me?"

I made a noise halfway between a groan and a sob and sank slowly to the ground.

How long I remained so, I am not certain. I felt more than a little delirious. In the midst of it I seemed to see a possible answer, though something within me rebelled against it. I was finally roused by the noises of the storm and Hugi's chattering.

"I can't beat it across that place," I whispered. "There is no way."

"You say you have failed," Hugi said. "But this is not so. There is neither failure nor victory in striving. It is all but an illusion of the ego."

I rose slowly to my knees.

"I did not say that I had failed."

"You said that you cannot go on to your destination."

I looked back, to where lightnings now flashed as the storm

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climbed toward me.

"That's right, I cannot do it that way. But if Dad failed, I have got to attempt something that Brand tried to convince me only he could do. I have to create a new Pattern, and I have to do it right here."

"You? Create a new Pattern? If Oberon failed, how could a man who can barely stay on his feet do it? No, Corwin. Resignation is the greatest virtue you might cultivate."

I raised my head and lowered the staff to the ground. Hugi fluttered down to stand beside it and I regarded him.

"You do not want to believe any of the things that I said, do you?" I told him. "It does not matter, though. The conflict between our views is irreducible. I see desire as hidden identity and striving as its growth. You do not." I moved my hands forward and rested them on my knees. "If for you the greatest good is union with the Absolute, then why do you not fly to join it now, in the form of the all-pervading Chaos which approaches? If I fail here, it will become Absolute. As for me, I must try, for so long as there is breath within me, to raise up a Pattern against it. I do this because I am what I am, and I am the man who could have been king in Amber."

Hugi lowered his head.

"I'll see you eat crow first," he said, and he chuckled.

I reached out quickly and twisted his head off, wishing that I had time to build a fire. Though he made it look like a sacrifice, it is difficult to say to whom the moral victory belonged, since I was planning on doing it anyway.

IX.

. . . . CASSIS, AND THE SMELL of the chestnut blossoms. All along the Champs-Elysées the chestnuts were foaming white . . . .

I remembered the play of the fountains in the Place de la Concorde . . . . And down the Rue de Seine and along the quais, the smell of the old books, the smell of the river . . . the smell of chestnut blossoms . . . .

Why should I suddenly remember 1905 and Paris on the shadow Earth, save that I was very happy that year and I might, reflexively, have sought an antidote for the present? Yes . . . .

White absinthe, Amer Picon, grenadine . . . wild strawberries, with Crème d'Isigny . . . chess at the Café de la Régence with actors from the Comédie Francaise, just across the way . . . the races at Chantilly . . . evenings at the Boîte à Fursy on the Rue Pigalle . . . .

I placed my left foot firmly before my right, my right before my left. In my left hand I held the chain from which the Jewel depended—and I carried it high, so that I could stare into the stone's depths, seeing and feeling there the emergence of the new Pattern that

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I described with each step. I had screwed my staff into the ground and left it to stand near the Pattern's beginning. Left . . . .

The wind sang about me and there was thunder near at hand. I did not meet with the physical resistance that I did on the old Pattern. There was no resistance at all. Instead—and in many ways worse—a peculiar deliberation had come over all my movements, slowing them, ritualizing them. I seemed to expend more energy in preparing for each step—perceiving it, realizing it and ordering my mind for its execution—than I did in the physical performance of the act. Yet the slowness seemed to require itself, was exacted of me by some unknown agency which determined precision and an *adagio* tempo for all my movements. Right . . . .

. . . And, as the Pattern in Rebma had helped to restore my faded memories, so this one I was now striving to create stirred and elicited the smell of the chestnut trees, of the wagonloads of vegetables moving through the dawn toward the Halles . . . I was not in love with anyone in particular at the time, though there were many girls—Yvettes and Mimis and Simones, their faces merge—and it was spring in Paris, with Gipsy bands and cocktails at Louis's . . . I remembered, and my heart leaped with a kind of Proustian joy while Time tolled about me like a bell . . .. And perhaps this was the reason for the recollection, for this joy seemed transmitted to my movements, informed my perceptions, empowered my will . . .

I saw the next step and I took it . . . I had been around once now, creating the perimeter of my Pattern. At my back, I could feel the storm. It must have mounted to the plateau's rim. The sky was darkening, the storm blotting the swinging, swimming, colored lights. Flashes of lightning splayed about, and I could not spare the energy and the attention to try to control things.

Having gone completely around, I could see that as much of the new Pattern as I had walked was now inscribed in the rock and glowing palely, bluely. Yet there were no sparks, no tingles in my feet, no hair-raising currents—only the steady law of deliberation, upon me like a great weight . . . left . . . .

. . . Poppies, poppies and cornflowers and tall poplars along country roads, the taste of Normandy cider . . . and in town again, the smell of the chestnut blossoms . . . the Seine full of stars . . . the smell of the old brick houses in the Place de Vosges after a morning's rain . . . the bar under the Olympia Music Hall . . . a fight there . . . bloodied knuckles, bandaged by a girl who took me home . . . what was her name? Chestnut blossoms . . . a white rose . . . .

I sniffed then. The odor was all but

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gone from the remains of the rose at my collar. Surprising that any of it had survived this far. It heartened me. I pushed ahead, curving gently to my right. From the corner of my eye, I saw the advancing wall of the storm, slick as glass, obliterating everything it passed. The roar of its thunder was deafening now.

Right, left . . .

The advance of the armies of the night . . . would my Pattern hold against it? I wished that I might hurry, but if anything, I was moving with increasing slowness as I went on. I felt a curious sense of bilocation, almost as if I were within the Jewel tracing the Pattern there myself while I moved out here, regarding it and mimicking its progress. Left . . . turn . . . right . . . . The storm was indeed advancing. Soon it would reach old Hugi's bones. I smelled the moisture and the ozone and wondered about the strange dark bird who had said he'd been waiting for me since the beginning of Time. Waiting to argue with me or to be eaten by me in this place without history? Whatever, considering the exaggeration usual in moralists, it was fitting that, having failed to leave me with my heart all laden with rue over my spiritual condition, he be consumed to the accompaniment of theatrical thunder . . . . There was distant thunder, near thunder and more thunder now. As I turned in that direction once more, the lightning flashes were nearly blinding. I clutched my chain and took another step . . . .

The storm pushed right up to the edge of my Pattern, and then it parted. It began to creep around me. Not a drop fell upon me or the Pattern. But slowly, gradually, we came to be totally engulfed within it.

It seemed as if I were in a bubble at the bottom of a stormy sea. Walls of water encircled me and dark shapes darted by. It seemed as if the entire universe were pressing in to crush me. I concentrated on the red world of the Jewel. Left . . . .

The chestnut blossoms . . . a cup of hot chocolate at a sidewalk café . . . a band concert in the Tuileries Gardens, the sounds climbing through the sunbright air . . . Berlin in the twenties, the Pacific in the thirties—there had been pleasures there, but of a different order. It may not be the true past, but images of the past that rush to comfort or torment us later, man or nation. No matter. Across the Pont Neuf and down the Rue Rivoli, buses and fiacres . . . painters at their easels in the Luxembourg Gardens . . . . If all were to fall well, I might seek a shadow like this again one day . . . it ranked with my Avalon. I had forgotten . . . the details . . . the touches that make for life . . . the smell of the chestnuts . . . .

Walking . . . I completed another circuit. The wind screamed and the storm roared on, but I was un-

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touched. So long as I did not permit it to distract me, so long as I kept moving and maintained my focus on the Jewel . . . I had to hold up, had to keep taking these slow, careful steps, never to stop, slower and slower but constantly moving . . . . Faces . . . it seemed that rows of faces regarded me from beyond the Pattern's edge . . . large, like the Head, but twisted—grinning, jeering, mocking me, waiting for me to stop or step wrongly . . . waiting for the whole thing to come apart around me . . . there was lightning behind their eyes and in their mouths, their laughter was the thunder . . . shadows crawled among them . . . now they spoke to me, with words like a gale from off a dark ocean . . . I would fail, they told me, fail and be swept away, this fragment of a Pattern dashed to pieces behind me and consumed . . . . They cursed me, they spat and vomited toward me, though none of it reached . . . perhaps they were not really there . . . perhaps my mind had been broken by the strain . . . then what good were my efforts? A new Pattern to be shaped by a madman? I wavered, and they took up the chorus, "Mad! Mad! Mad!" in the voices of the elements.

I drew a deep breath and smelled what was left of the rose and thought of chestnuts once again, and days filled with the joys of life and organic order. The voices seemed to soften as my mind raced back through the events of that happy year . . . and I took another step . . . and another . . . They had been playing on my weaknesses, they could feel my doubts, my anxiety, my fatigue . . . . Whatever they were, they seized what they saw and tried to use it against me . . . . Left . . . right . . . . Now let them feel my confidence and wither, I told myself. I have come this far. I will continue. Left . . . .

They swirled and swelled about me, still mouthing discouragements. But some of the force seemed gone out of them. I made my way through another section of arc, seeing it grow before me in my mind's red eye.

I thought back to my escape from Greenwood, to my tricking Flora out of information, to my encounter with Random, our fight with his pursuers, our journey back to Amber . . . I thought of our flight to Rebma and my walking of the reversed Pattern there for a restoration of much of my memory . . . of Random's shotgun wedding and my sojourn to Amber, where I fought with Eric and fled to Bleys . . . of the battles that followed, my blinding, my recovery, my escape, my journey to Lorraine and then to Avalon.

Moving into even higher gear, my mind skimmed the surface of subsequent events . . . Ganelon and Lorraine . . . the creatures of the Black Circle . . . Benedict's arm

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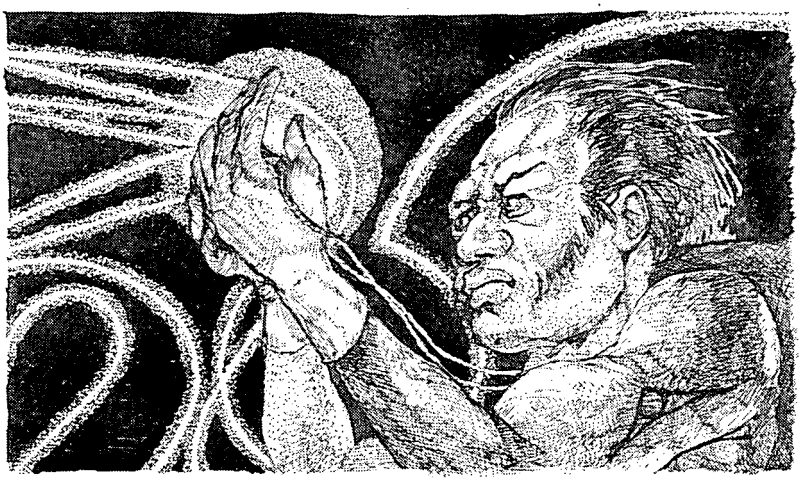

. . . Dara . . . the return of Brand and his stabbing . . . my stabbing . . . Bill Roth . . . hospital records . . . my accident . . . .

. . . Now, from the very beginning at Greenwood, through it all, to this moment of my struggle to assure each perfect maneuver as it appeared to me, I felt the growing sense of anticipation I had known—whether my actions were directed toward the throne, vengeance, or my conception of duty—felt it, was aware of its continuous existence across those years up until this moment, when it was finally accompanied by something else . . . I felt that the waiting was just about over, that whatever I had been anticipating and struggling toward was soon to occur.

Left . . . very, very slowly . . . nothing else was important. I threw all of my will into the movements now. My concentration became total. Whatever lay beyond the Pattern, I was now oblivious to it. Lightnings, faces, winds . . . it did not matter. There was only the Jewel, the growing Pattern and myself—and I was barely aware of myself. Perhaps this was the closest I would ever come to Hugi's ideal of merging with the Absolute. Turn . . . right foot . . . turn again.

Time ceased to have meaning. Space was restricted to the design I was creating. I drew strength from the Jewel without summoning it now, as part of the process in which

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I was engaged. In a sense, I suppose, I was obliterated. I became a moving point, programmed by the Jewel, performing an operation which absorbed me so totally that I had no attention available for self-consciousness. Yet, at some level, I realized that I was a part of the process, also. For I knew, somehow, that were anyone else doing it, it would be a different Pattern emerging.

I was vaguely aware that I had passed the halfway point. The way had become trickier, my movements even slower. Despite the matter of velocity, I was somehow reminded of my experiences on originally becoming attuned to the Jewel, in that strange, many-dimensional matrix that seemed to be the source of the Pattern itself.

Right . . . left . . . .

There was no drag. I felt very light, despite the deliberation. A boundless energy seemed to wash constantly through me. All of the sounds about me had merged into a white noise and vanished.

Suddenly then, I no longer seemed to be moving slowly. It did not seem as if I had passed a Veil or barrier, but rather that I had undergone internal adjustment.

It felt as if I were moving at a more normal pace now, winding my way through tighter and tighter coils, approaching what would soon be the design's terminus. Mainly, I was still emotionless, though I knew intellectually that at some level a sense of elation was growing and would soon burst through. Another step . . . another . . . perhaps half a dozen more paces.

Suddenly the world went dark. It seemed that I stood within a great void, with only the faint light of the Jewel before me and the glow of the Pattern like a spiral nebula through which I was striding. I wavered, but only for an instant. This must be the last trial, the final assault. I would have to be sufficient to the distraction.

The Jewel showed me what to do and the Pattern showed me where to do it. The only thing missing was a view of myself. Left . . . .

I continued, executing each move with all of my attention. An opposing force began to rise against me finally, as on the old Pattern. But for this I was prepared by years of experience. I struggled for two more steps against the mounting barrier.

Then, within the Jewel, I saw the ending of the Pattern. I would have gasped at the sudden realization of its beauty, but at this point even my breath was regulated by my efforts. I threw all of my strength into the next step, and the void seemed to shake about me: I completed it, and the next was even more difficult. I felt as if I were at the center of the universe, treading on stars, struggling to impart some essential motion by what was basically an act of will.

My foot slowly advanced, though

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I could not see it. The Pattern began to brighten. Soon its blaze was almost blinding.

Just a little farther . . . I strove harder than I ever had on the old Pattern, for now the resistance seemed absolute. I had to oppose it with a firmness and constancy of will that excluded everything else, though I seemed not to be moving at all now, though all of my energies seemed diverted into the brightening of the design. At least I would go out with a splendid backdrop . . . .

Minutes, days, years . . . I do not know how long this went on. It felt like forever, as if I had been engaged in this single act for all of eternity . . . .

Then I moved, and how long that took I do not know. But I completed the step and began another. Then another . . . .

The universe seemed to reel about me. I was through.

The pressure was gone. The blackness was gone . . . .

For an instant I stood at the center of my Pattern. Without even regarding it, I fell forward onto my knees and bent double, my blood pounding in my ears. Head swimming, I panted. I began to shake, all over. I had done it, I realized dimly. Come whatever may, there was a Pattern. And it would endure.

I heard a sound where there should have been none, but my jaded muscles refused to respond, even reflexively, until it was too late. Not until the Jewel was jerked from my limp fingers did I raise my head and roll back onto my haunches. No one had been following me through the Pattern—I was certain that I would have been aware of it. Therefore . . . .

The light was almost normal, and blinking against it, I looked up into Brand's smiling face. He wore a black eyepatch now, and he held the Jewel in his hand. He must have teleported himself in.

He struck me just as I raised my head, and I fell onto my left side. He kicked me in the stomach then, hard.

"Well, you've done it," he said. "I did not think you could. Now I have another Pattern to destroy before I set things right. I need this to turn the battle at the Courts first, though." He waved the Jewel. "Good-bye for now."

And he vanished.

I lay there gasping and clutching at my stomach. Waves of blackness rose and fell, like a surf, within me, though I did not completely succumb to unconsciousness. A feeling of enormous despair washed over me, and I closed my eyes and moaned. There was no Jewel for me to draw upon now, either.

The chestnut trees . . . .

TO BE CONCLUDED

* * *

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E.F. SCHUMACHER, RIP

LAST NIGHT I received a gift from a character in one of my books. At least that's what my friend Bob Prehoda (*Designing the Future,* Chilton Press) claims, and he ought to know. Bob says that he is the remote ancestor of Trader Horace Bury, Magnate, who appears in *The Mote in God's Eye,* and that his remote descendant asked him to deliver the gift to me, presumably because I have been Bury's chronicler.

None of which would be of any interest to GALAXY readers except that during the conversation, Bob told me that E. F. Schumacher, guru of the Appropriate Technology Movement, died this week and we fell to reminiscences about the AP movement. Prehoda was to have confronted Schumacher in a seminar at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions later this year and remembered the last time he'd been in a debate with the late economist.

Certainly the man *cared.* Unlike the Grinch, Schumacher's heart was several sizes too large. He wanted people to be happy and the subtitle of his *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* sums up his view of life. If one is judged by

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one's intentions, Schumacher has ascended to Paradise.

If the High Gods judge us by our consequences, the man may be in the blackest pits of Hell.

Bob's story is typical: in the course of one of the seminars at the Santa Barbara Center, Prehoda mentioned that magnetic-confinement fusion systems would probably require temperatures in the order of 50 million degrees Kelvin—and Schumacher was horrified.

"How can you contemplate such hellish temperatures? It's terrifying," said the sage; and no amount of explanation of the nature of plasmas (the pressures inside a fusion reactor would be called a high-grade industrial vacuum in most contexts) could induce him to change his opinion.

His ignorance of modern technology and engineering was profound and apparently unbreachable. Yet Schumacher was the leader of a powerful movement; he had much to say about coal and oil and nonrenewable resources that ought to have been listened to; his analysis of the problems of developing countries ought to be required reading for anyone involved with such things. In 1953, as a member of Britain's Coal Resources Board, he predicted the energy crisis. He was a man of power—and his conclusions were based on nonsense, profound ignorance, utter contempt for physics and science. Should leaders be held responsible for what they do not know?

At a recent convention I was sought out by a young man who is an advisor to a powerful Congressman. The Congressman is concerned with science and technology. His advisor is concerned with ethics, and was obviously under the influence of Schumacher and the AP movement. And lo, the young man's knowledge of elementary physics and engineering is best described in charitable terms. It is worse than lacking; if he thought he knew nothing of the subject, we would all be better off. Instead, he is possessed of a series of clichés and half-truths and slogans. He is, after all, concerned with ethics, not engineering, and I suppose feels no need to study anything as dry and inhuman as equations and the calculus.

In his defense I will say that he was willing to listen and to believe that much of what he thought he knew as truth was simple nonsense not even accepted by the more responsible anti-technology people. Indeed, despite the nonsense that passed for physics in his intellectual armory, he was, overall, highly in favor of technology on ethical grounds.

Should he be held responsible for what he does not know?

Not long ago, here in southern California, there was a mass demonstration against expansion of the San Onofre Nuclear Power Station. One of the demonstrators who came

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in from the East Coast was an old friend, a Chaucerian scholar of some importance and great readability. I had not seen him for years and he telephoned to say that he would be out here, and that perhaps we could renew old acquaintances, even though we are very much on the opposite sides of the San Onofre question.

He arrived and we talked by telephone but we did not meet. He left right after the demonstration. He is allergic to smog and he couldn't stand our southern California air. It never occurred to him that his activities might be contributing to our air problem. Is he responsible for his ignorance? Or is Schumacher?

* * *

E. F. Schumacher's major thesis was that a narrowly conceived profit motive should not be the sole decision criterion for major questions; that economics ought to be considered "as if people mattered." There are, he said, questions of public policy involved in the implementation of technology. There are questions of ethics, of human development and human pain, of esthetics; and in addition to those already living, the unborn have a right to be considered.

Who can fault that view? Certainly no one who pretends to be conservative. From Edmund Burke on, the great conservative theorists have emphasized that society is more than a joint stock company for trading in coffee and tea; that a nation is a pact between the living, the dead and those yet to live; that the profit motive is a fine thing but hardly the end for which mankind labors.

Schumacher has, after all, said no more than St. Thomas Aquinas: that prudence is a cardinal virtue. One ought to give thought to the consequences of one's actions and take responsibility not merely for what one intends, but what is likely to happen.

But did Schumacher, do the Appropriate Technology people, live by this stricture?

* * *

By the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread. No one has, at least to my knowledge, interpreted that to mean what it literally says: that not even animal power may be used in cultivation; that all agriculture must be hand work and stoop labor. And if by the sweat of one's face must one eat bread, it is also true that no economy based on human labor will ever produce penicillin. If we truly love mankind, we must be concerned with more than muscle power.

It is easily arguable that energy resources are the most humane, the most liberating, the most *humanizing* technologies ever developed.

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Given energy, the world may be more than fed: there can be leisure. Given energy, everyone can be free in real terms: free to travel, free to enjoy good health, free to communicate with others across long distances, free to create for the sake of creation, free to enjoy art. Energy and technology have given the masses real freedoms, real choices, choices that matter; energy and technology have given to the masses the freedoms only dreamed of by the most powerful aristocrats of past centuries. The greatest king on Earth could not, when my father was young, travel across the United States in hours; now almost anyone can. Neither Rockefellers nor Rothschilds had penicillin in 1900; by the year 2000 the vast majority of the Earth will have penicillin and more as a matter of birthright.

I need not labor the point. Surely we can all agree that modern life is not merely more comfortable, but more humane, than was life in the past; and that this is due to technology and energy resources. We may not agree that the game is worth the candle; we may disagree about the costs; but surely there have been great benefits?

Now true: there exists a group of middle-class anti-technocrats who have a meaner view of the Earth; who wish the benefits of industry and science, of wealth, to be restricted to a favored few; who ask, "What are those street sweepers doing on *my* beach?" and curse when they find the low-born tramping through *their* national parks. There are probably more of such people than admit to it and they have a valid point, namely that some esthetic experiences by their very nature can be enjoyed only by a few; some pleasures are destroyed for all when all try to enjoy them. I am not concerned with these people here because few will openly argue their case. They may be right, but the intellectual and emotional temper of the times is much against them, and they know it. They do not come forward openly, but hide among others.

Surely, though, E. F. Schumacher was not one of those. Surely he truly believed that his work was beneficial to man; that he was practicing "economics as if people mattered." If the consequence of what he taught was to make us all a little (or a lot) poorer, that was, for him, an unfortunate necessity, not a positive goal.

No: on his terms, and in his intentions, Schumacher was a good man.

But what was his effect on the world?

* * *

"Of all the changes introduced by man into the household of nature, large-scale nuclear fission is undoubtedly the most dangerous and profound. As a result, ionizing radiation has become the

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most serious agent of pollution of the environment and the greatest threat to man's survival on earth. The attention of the layman, not surprisingly, has been captured by the atom bomb, although there is at least a chance that it may never be used again. The danger to humanity created by the so-called peaceful uses of atomic energy may be much greater."

From *Small is Beautiful,* p. 135.

Strong words and noble sentiments—but are they true? Has man invented a new technology so terrible in its possible consequences that it might make the entire earth uninhabitable? If so, are we not better off without it?

But here we enter a realm where noble sentiments are not enough. We have come to a regime of facts and hard numbers, of engineering and data; and Schumacher is egregiously wrong.

In the first place, nuclear reactors are not new. Mankind didn't invent them. A billion years ago a natural reactor operated periodically in Africa (in what is now the Republic of Gabon). There was natural uranium close to the surface and when water flowed into these uranium pockets to act as a moderator, the deposits went critical. For half a million years or more an average of 20 kW of thermal power was generated untended. Tons of plutonium were created, along with six tons of fission products. None of this was removed, decontaminated, recycled, placed in deep mines or indeed disturbed by human hands; yet the Earth was not destroyed.

Schumacher made his reputation as a member of the Coal Resources Board and argued forcefully against closing down Europe's coal production back in the fifties when oil was plentiful and cheap. He was certainly vindicated by the energy crisis but the fact remains that he was a strong advocate of coal technology. Yet because of natural radioactivity present in coal, the radiation released to the environment by a coal-fired electrical power plant is about 180 times the dose put out by a nuclear plant of equal capacity; indeed, if coal plants were under the jurisdiction of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, they would be in violation of NRC standards and have to close down. And note: this radioactivity is released with no monitoring, dumped out the stack close to the surface of the Earth, let float free in the atmosphere. Of course it isn't dangerous. The amount is trivial. But it is much greater than the radioactivity put forth by nuclear plants.

No one now says that a nuclear plant might "go off like a bomb"; even the most ignorant of nuclear opponents knows better than that. Yet we have books such as *We Almost Lost Detroit* which strongly imply it, and enjoy distribution by

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appropriate technology advocates. No member of the public has ever been injured by a nuclear power plant accident. All the "catastrophes" involving nuclear power are on paper. They are mere theories and speculations. There are arguments about whether a nuclear accident costing a billion dollars might happen once in a every ten thousand years, or every thousand.

Yet—the probability that we will pay a billion dollars in compensation to the victims of coal power is unity. We already pay a billion *each year* in Black Lung compensation.

The worst theoretical accident postulated for a nuclear plant—an accident that can happen once every million years, or hundred thousand years, or perhaps as often as every thousand years—might kill three thousand people. This assumes a large power plant near a large city; that a guillotine cut-in which no coolant flow whatever continues happens to cooling lines; that all the emergency systems fail; that the reactor crew is unable to introduce coolant manually through the severed pipe; that the three-foot reinforced concrete containment is broached; that the reactor core melts through the six-inch steel reactor vessel; that there is a temperature inversion that day; that the radioactive leak comes out as fine particles rather than as chunks; and that a strong wind is blowing from the reactor to the city. Given all this, and that the city is not evacuated (there would be several hours' warning), the reactor accident might kill three thousand people.

In December 1952, thirty-nine hundred people died in London as a result of air pollution from coal burning. The number of people in southern California killed by smog is not known but it is not zero.

In *The Health Hazards of Not Going Nuclear* Dr. Petr Beckmann of the University of Colorado (the book is available for $5.95 from Petr Beckmann, Box 1342, Boulder, Colorado 80302) details a long comparison between the hazards of our present methods of generating power, and what would happen if we converted to nuclear power plants. The conclusion is interesting: many lives would be saved.

But perhaps Beckmann—and the nuclear engineers and scientists on whose studies he has relied—are wrong? Is this not a matter of controversy?

Perhaps. Saying so will not change the fact that we are killing people with our present methods of power generation. It may be controversial as to which is more dangerous, coal or nuclear power; but at least the advocates of nuclear power have examined the consequences of their stand. Of the dangers of coal and fossil fuels you will find in Schumacher little more than this:

"What, after all, is the fouling

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of air with smoke compared with the pollution of air, water, and soil with ionizing radiation? Not that I wish in any way to belittle the evils of conventional air and water pollution; but we must recognise 'dimensional differences' when we encounter them: radioactive pollution is an evil of an incomparably greater 'dimension' than anything mankind has known before. One might even ask, what is the point of insisting on clean air, if the air is laden with radioactive particles? And even if the air could be protected, what is the point of it, if the soil and water are being poisoned?''

Needless to say, neither Schumacher nor his followers are interested in the answers to such questions. When one attempts to show an advocate of ''appropriate technology'' the technological means by which problems such as nuclear ''wastes'' may be disposed of, the reaction is seldom polite. ''Technological quick fixes'' are of no interest because by definition such technology is ''inappropriate.''

For them, nuclear wastes are not real physical objects. If the entire United States operated exclusively on nuclear power, the wastes generated would be about the size of an aspirin tablet for each of us each year. The resulting mess could be stored above ground in the Mojave Desert for centuries, assuming that nothing better could be devised; but that is the real world. To Schumacher and his followers, ''nuclear wastes'' are objects of terror:

> ''The most massive wastes are, of course, the nuclear reactors themselves after they have become unserviceable . . . they cannot be dismantled and cannot be shifted, but have to be left standing where they are, probably for centuries, perhaps for thousands of years, an active menace to all life, silently leaking radioactivity into air, water, and soil. No one has considered the number and location of these satanic mills which will relentlessly accumulate.''

This is good poetry; but of course ''someone'' has considered the problem. Indeed, there are thousands of pages of testimony before Congressional Committees, stacks of reports, blueprints, studies, tests, demonstration projects—all of which Schumacher can ignore in favor of discussions of ''satanic mills.'' Confronted by engineering studies, Schumacher could declare:

> ''No amount of prosperity could justify the accumulation of large quantitites of highly toxic substances which nobody knows how to make 'safe' and which remain an incalculable danger to

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the whole of creation for historical or even geological ages.''

When told that the dangers were not ''incalculable'' and that in fact the calculations had been made, his answer was: ''To do such a thing is a transgression against life itself, a transgression infinitely more serious than any crime ever perpetrated by man. The idea that a civilization could sustain itself on the basis of such a transgression is an ethical, spiritual, and metaphysical monstrosity. It means conducting the economic affairs of man as if people really did not matter at all.''

This is the language of the Old Testament, not of science; it is Jeremiah let loose among us; for of course Schumacher did not *want* engineering answers to technological problems. Nuclear power was for him the more dangerous the safer it could be made: for it let loose the genie of plenty and ''prosperity'' on the world—and that, to Schumacher, was evil in itself.

* * *

''When I first began to travel the world, visiting rich and poor countries alike, I was tempted to formulate the first law of economics as follows: 'The amount of real leisure a society enjoys tends to be in inverse proportion to the amount of labor-saving machinery it employs.

''The evidence is very strong indeed. If you go from easy-going England to, say, Germany or the United States, you find that people there live under much more strain than here. And if you move to a country like Burma, which is very near to the bottom of the league table of industrial progress, you find that people have an enormous amount of leisure really to enjoy themselves.''

Could Schumacher have believed that? Surely he knew that, given the opportunity, many Burmese would move to England or the United States but that there was little traffic the other way. For that matter, although he spent a number of years as economic advisor to one or another of the generals who ruled Burma, Schumacher himself did not choose to live there—and while he was resident, he did not live at the peasant subsistence level.

And yet his understanding of the problems of the Third World was often profound. His insistence on ''intermediate technology'' rather than the latest products of Detroit and Liverpool; his popularization of the concept of technology ''appropriate'' to the places where it was to be introduced; above all, his understanding that a man who makes ten dollars a year will be discouraged and defeated by machinery costing hundreds of thousands of dollars, but might aspire to owner-

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ship of tools costing only twenty dollars; all these were real contributions to the happiness of mankind.

It is this which is so exasperating about the Schumachers of this world. They understand that man does not live by aerosol cans alone; that there is a profound inherent difficulty with a society that produces more and more people who can make little or no contribution to it; that as we increasingly divorce meaning from work, we produce a generation that hates its jobs. They understand this; but they do not seem able to understand that, given the choice, most would prefer the boring assembly-line job and the gadgets and aerosol cans to a life of farming.

Technology makes choices real. Primitive man is close to "meaningful work" and close to the soil because he must be. Primitive man has no choice but to eat bread through the sweat of his face. To denounce modern technology is to denounce choice, to say that people must have their lives decided for them; and there are many in the appropriate technology movement ready to make these choices—for others.

And yet, having said all that; having said that E. F. Schumacher may well have have assisted at the birth of a world he would not love, one must give him credit. He was good at pricking balloons, and all the silliness was hardly confined to his side of the debate.

He was at his best when discussing the needs of developing nations:

"Everything sounds very difficult and in a sense it is very difficult if it is done *for* the people, instead of *by* the people. But let us not think that development or employment is anything but the most natural thing in the world. It occurs in every healthy person's life. There comes a time when he simply sets to work. In a sense this is much easier to do now than it has ever been in human history. Why? Because there is so much more knowledge.

"So let's not mesmerize ourselves by the difficulties, but recover the commonsense view that to work is the most natural thing in the world. Only one must not be blocked by being too damn clever about it. . . . I think the stupid man who says 'something is better than nothing' is much more intelligent than the clever chap who will not let us touch anything unless it is optimal. What is stopping [India]? Theories, planning. I have come across planners at the Planning Commission who have convinced themselves that even within fifteen years it is not possible to put the willing labor power of India to work . . . this is just a sort of degeneracy of the intellect."

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This is a man in righteous wrath at "social engineers" who want everything planned before anything can start; who will not give the people a scythe because it is a waste, what with the tractor coming in a few months. It is Schumacher at his best and one wishes he had stayed with what he knew—intermediate technology, simplification of work for a people trying to pull themselves forward from the 11th century.

* * *

It is traditional to speak only good of the dead. Perhaps I should end with Schumacher's best but I cannot. An uglier image thrusts itself forward.

In 146 B.C. the Romans captured Carthage. The city was destroyed and the site ritually sown with salt. The great library was burned. The records of the Phoenicians were lost. We now know that Phoenician ships had sailed clear around Africa; there is mounting evidence that there were Phoenician colonies in the New World. The books were burned and the knowledge lost forever.

In A.D. 640 the Caliph Omar burned the Great Library of Alexandria. "If the writings of the Greeks are consistent with the Book of God (Koran), they are not needed; if they are not, they are heresy. Burn them all," he ordered. His son spent a lifetime gathering the pitiful remnants of the greatest collection of knowledge then assembled in the world.

In 1204 the Franks burned the Great Library of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Much that had survived Omar was lost then.

What has this to do with Schumacher? He said, not once but several times, that if all the books on nuclear technology could be assembled in one place, he would cheerfully set them alight—to produce steam. Steam is "appropriate" technology for man. Nuclear is not.

And mankind faces a critical decision. This generation, and perhaps the next, has the riches and the knowledge to take us from this planet and put us into the solar system. For the moment, a very brief moment in human history; we have the wealth and we could go forth into space. Whether by doing so we would forever "solve" the problems of famine and want is a matter for debate and discussion. My point is that there can be more than one dream.

Each man sitting under his own fig tree and pruning his own vine is a noble vision—but it is a limited vision. Surely man has long had higher goals? Should we not have the choice?

And that is the danger of Schumacher's movement: it would deny choice. I can conceive of a future in which space-faring man confines high technology and adventure to other planets and leaves this one "unspoiled," parklike, a place of

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vines and fig trees.

I cannot believe in Schumacher's future, limited to Only One Earth. Behind the poetic vision is the hard reality: without energy and technology lies a world in which only by the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.

* * *

What are we to make of "appropriate technology"? It can be seductive. Consider the vision of each man, woman and child in India planting and maintaining one tree a year so that after five years this "would give you 2,000 million established trees. Anyone can work it out on the back of an envelope that the economic value of such an enterprise, intelligently conducted, would be greater than anything that has ever been promised by any of India's five-year plans. It could be done without a penny of foreign aid; there is no problem of savings and investments. It would produce foodstuffs, fibres, building materials, shade, water, almost anything that man really needs . . . what sort of education prevents us from thinking of things ready to be done immediately? What makes us think we need electricity, cement, and steel before we can do anything at all?" This is seductive stuff, and valuable advice. Certainly people should not be encouraged to sit about doing nothing until some large organization saves them.

But it will never be enough. Two thousand million trees is still only five trees for each man, woman and child; and five trees will not provide foodstuffs, fibre, building material, "almost anything that man really needs." Had appropriate technology stopped with the trees, the movement would be invaluable. Had it spoken to us, as did the slave at the Roman Triumph, to remind us that we are mortal, and that technology is not a goal of itself, I would cheerfully acquiesce in making *Small is Beautiful* required reading in every engineering college in the land.

But it does not stop there. It goes on: to the Clamshell Alliance which seeks to halt "nuclear pollution" along coasts where the only shellfish surviving the Great Winter of '76 are alive because of "thermal pollution" of the water; to my friend who came to southern California to halt "nuclear pollution" of my homeland but who could not stay over with me because of the smog; to the frantic efforts to stop the Space Shuttle and close down the fusion plants.

Let Schumacher provide his own epitaph:

> "What matters is the direction of research, that the direction should be towards non-violence rather than violence; towards an harmonious cooperation with nature rather than a warfare against nature; towards the noiseless,

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low-energy, elegant, and economical solutions normally applied in nature rather than the noisy, high-energy, brutal, wasteful, and clumsy solutions of our present-day sciences.

"The continuation of scientific advance in the direction of ever-increasing violence, culminating in nuclear fission and moving on to nuclear fusion, is a prospect of terror threatening the abolition of man."

Strong words, words which he must have believed: but how is a coal mine less violent than San Onofre? How is the hellish blast of a boiler, the strip-mining of Black Mesa, the slurry pipeline across Arizona and New Mexico, less noisy than the near-silent hum of the turbines in a modern nuclear plant?

Of course I have used loaded words, as did Schumacher, and there is the point. Mankind will not be saved by talk of "hellish temperatures" and "satanic mills" any more than it will be saved by Carl Sandberg's poetic hymns to Chicago. We live in a world that needs poets and poetic vision; but it needs at least as much those who can understand Maxwell's equations.

It is possible that advocates of nuclear power—myself among them—are wrong. What is not acceptable is that public policy be decided by the exchange of irrational slogans.

And the decision *is* important. It is not simply a matter of putting off nuclear power because "it might kill the lot of us." So "might" a number of things—including wars and famines brought on by lack of energy resources. True, discussion of policies must not be confined merely to equations. Esthetics must enter. There is more to life than simple survival, and a great deal more than profit.

But is not $e = mc^2$ as elegant as a sonnet?

Schumacher leaves two legacies. The one is a reminder that there is more than economics. People must do what they can. It is the vision of every man, woman and child in India planting a tree and tending it. It is the vision of a world in which all can participate and all are needed.

The other is an uglier legacy: of arguments from ignorance; of followers who convince themselves they are right because they are "concerned"; of "ecologists" who know no ecology; of modern Luddites who, not content with planting trees, must sabotage the power plants; of the irrational belief that because one's heart is pure, one need know no more than poetic phrases and catchy slogans; of an anti-rational world.

We can hope that the one legacy will die, and the other live after him.

E. F. Schumacher, RIP. ★

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Like the song says, "A Man ain't nothin' but a man"—machines are not so limited.

JOHN HENRY AND THE ULTRA-MODERN ENGINEERING MACHINE

BY LEE WHIPPLE

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HIS PICTURE WAS GONE.

Inside his mind he could still see himself in the glossy black and white: A quiet pose, seated on a stool with his white-faced guitar balanced lightly against his knee, the words "John Henry Roberts Appearing Nightly. Last Live Entertainment in Chicago" printed below.

Several times his eyes and mind played leap-frog, projecting his picture for an instant upon the empty display-board; his pride was buying a second or two to absorb and adjust. But the picture was gone. John Henry knew this. And why.

The Ultra-Media marquee, much like the ones over other nightspots in Chicago, was already up; it blared its menu of media delights in bright colors—"WORLD CUP YACHT RACING," "SCENES FROM VENUS," "STAR TRAVEL SYMPHONY"—A Collection Of Music From Other Worlds."

A ring of dull-glowing suns circled the marquee, indicating the Ultra-Media system within was complete with *patron feedback, instant coordination, World Premier* capacity. The dull suns on the marquee might at any instant blaze into an electric fire-storm of white and yellow and blue light—signaling to people on the street the computer-assisted system inside had struck on a novel combination, matching patron mood and desire with media capacity stored in its memory banks and, at that moment, was producing a completely unique media experience.

The old sign "Ramón's," was still in its place over the door. But you had to squint and shield your eyes with a hand to see it.

John Henry stood in the glare of the Ultra-Media marquee, its electric song an omen—especially for him. He stared at the empty display-board where only yesterday his picture had been; he stared and suffered his feelings of hurt and surprise; he allowed self-pity, wasp-like, to dance in his eyes like the light from the marquee itself. Finally he brushed it away.

A fine anger began to build within him.

He went inside.

* * *

"Ramón, how could you do this? Ramón . . . ."

Ramón stood behind the bar, polishing a glass. The Ultra-Media Experience Machine, a silver cloud, floated silently at the far end of the room; a bank of computers covered an adjacent wall.

"I am sorry, my friend. Truly, I am sorry," Ramón said as he studied the glass he was holding, rubbing it with exaggerated care.

"You should have told me . . . . *Jesus,* at least you could have told me."

"I tried, John Henry, last night, last week . . . I could not. I am sorry."

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John Henry cursed shortly; he put his guitar case down on the floor and turned, leaning his back against the bar. "Give me a beer, Ramón. You still serve beer, I hope—or do we watch that on the machine now too?"

Ramón drew the beer in silence and placed it on the bar. John Henry took it, a small sign of peace between them. He drank slowly and looked at the crowd.

Several familiar faces, people who came to hear him play: They talked earnestly across the tables, glancing now and again in his direction, then quickly away. Bits of conversation floated over the room—

"It's not the same, no machine will ever . . . ."

"Last place in Chicago, the battle's over . . . ."

". . . machine's better, face it."

"Live entertainment's dead, that's all there is to it."

John Henry glanced at the clock. Ten minutes to show time. He looked at the dark cellar walls and the ancient stairs leading up to the street; he thought about the 1940s, and jazz, and what it must have been like.

"John, what are you going to do?" Ramón asked. "What about the theater, anything there?"

John Henry laughed. "I was out of the acting business when I started here—there hasn't been a live play in Chicago in three years."

"Why don't you sign up with one of the media companies? You're good, John. You'd do all right."

"No."

"Why, John?"

"The same reason you were the last club in Chicago to hire a live musician. Don't ask me why. You know why, Ramón."

"Aw John, don't. Things have changed. You gotta know that. I couldn't have lasted another year—"

"Yeah, I know that, Ramón. I know that." Another glance at the clock. Time to go. Maybe you couldn't stand in its way. But you didn't have to watch. "See you, huh—"

John Henry got almost to the door. He was pushed back inside by a stampede of customers.

* * *

The dull suns on the marquee had gone bright, calling people from the evening-crowded Chicago street into Ramón's. A *World Premier* media experience was about to happen.

"What luck," someone said, "to be right outside."

"I've never seen a Premier, this is my first," said another.

"You're in for something, that's for sure—they don't do this unless they've really got something . . . ." someone answered.

The club was nearly full. John Henry was pushed back against the bar, painfully near the stage where he used to perform.

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The silver cloud began to glow; lights blinked along the computers. People hurried toward tables, carrying liters of beer and sangria and starlight wine, some balancing five and six glasses. The crowd before the bar remained several deep. Ramón hurriedly handed drinks and collected money.

"GOOD EVENING, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. WELCOME TO AN ULTRA-MEDIA WORLD PREMIER," a holographic anchor-man spoke from his desk amidst the silver cloud. "The Ultra-Media, patron feedback, instant coordination system has matched the moods and desires present in this very room, just a few minutes ago, with the most extensive media-experience library in the world. A completely unique, once only, media experience is about to occur—and *you are here!*"

The silver cloud blinked and the anchor-man was gone. Three-dimensional letters, red in a mist of yellow, floated within the cloud—

John Henry
vs
The Ultra-Media
Experience Machine

John Henry removed his guitar from its case and moved to the little stage near the bar; he sat down on the familiar stool and hooked a heel beneath him.

"I accept," he said.

The lights along the computers flashed briefly, matter-of-factly: "This was not a question," they seemed to say.

John Henry could feel the great silver eye studying him, recording, no doubt, his heart beat, the dilation of his pupils, changes in Galvanic skin response; he put on his best poker-face and tried to calm his insides.

A trumpet note sounded. The cloud glowed briefly, blinked, and an official-looking man appeared near the bar. "Rules of the Contest," he began and then, as John Henry listened, ticked them off. Both he and the machine were to have an opening statement. The remainder of the contest was to be unstructured, the method of resolution undetermined, choice of communication medias unrestricted. Rough and tumble, no holds barred, John Henry translated. Fair enough.

The cloud blinked and the official-looking man was gone.

"Agreed," said John Henry.

The lights along the computers flashed matter-of-factly again.

A gold coin appeared in the air; it landed with a convincing metal-on-wood vibrato near one of the tables.

"Tails," John Henry called.

"It's tails, that's what it is," cried a man near the coin.

The coin disappeared.

John Henry settled himself on his stool and carefully tuned his instrument.

* * *

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Round One: Statements.

A series of single notes, deep and clear, struck by John Henry's fingers issued from the beautiful blond wood of his instrument, came brightly into the air and hung in perfect orbs of sounds, each one fading just as another came to sing in its place. Prelude No. IX by Johan Sebastian Bach spoke clearly across the centuries, eloquent, oblivious to time.

The single notes mixed and sang together and then went off again on their separate ways: Two converging ideas, blending perfectly at times in a single note, then separating gracefully, their identities intact. John Henry's head was bent as in prayer—speaking and listening in the same moment.

The last notes were allowed to dim and fade into silence. Then, explosive applause.

Ramón came from behind the bar and handed John Henry a cold glass of beer. "You can win, John Henry, I can feel it." He touched John Henry's arm and returned.

The room was becoming quiet. John Henry took a long drink from his glass and waited.

Bartholomew Diaz, some thirty years deceased, considered by many as great as Tarrega, appeared beside the cloud. He sat quietly, his guitar, inlaid with silver and gold, held ready.

A deep announcer's voice filled the room: "Ladies and gentlemen —In the mountain village of Taranto, in the heel of the boot which is Italy, a young woman has been bitten by the dreaded tarantula. It is legend that if one dances the 'Tarantella' long enough and hard enough, it will prevent the onset of coma and the certain death which follows. The young woman's lover has brought a guitarist; they will dance for her life and for their love . . . ."

The cloud glowed softly, revealing the village square of Taranto. A young couple surrounded by somber-faced family and friends swept into the square. A man with a guitar leaned against a nearby tree, obscure in its shadows. The young man and woman looked anxiously at one another; they embraced.

Bartholomew Diaz lifted his guitar and struck the first vibrant notes of Tedesdo's "Tarantella." The young woman and her lover began to dance.

Diaz, the master, lifted the tempo gradually at first. Then faster and faster, embellishing the keyboard of his instrument with dazzling grace. The young couple danced faster and faster, the young man compelling his lover with the language of his body and eyes.

The light in the village square slowly faded from afternoon into dusk. Torches appeared in the hands of the hopeful watchers, casting strange shadows.

Stars appeared, then the moon added its silver light.

And ever the tempo increased,

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became furious as the couple danced wildly, beautifully.

A faint light began to show in the sky, reddened softly, and then burst into dawn. The music stopped.

The villagers ran into the square shouting and embracing; the young couple clung to one another triumphantly; the guitarist was being carried on the shoulders of several men; children were running and leaping into the air. It was over, the time of danger was past.

In Ramón's the scene was not dissimilar. A pandemonium was loose; a wild celebration was underway. John Henry, himself, was on his feet applauding.

* * *

Round Two: Replies.

When the room was finally quiet, when the clapping and shouting had finally died, when the crowd had once more taken their seats and turned themselves to hear John Henry's reply—he had nothing to say. He sat lost in the brilliance of his opponent's performance. Doubt had grown into a cancer and was eating his soul.

Perhaps he was wrong; perhaps the day of the live entertainer was gone; perhaps he had confused depth with mere sentiment, was clinging to a thing whose time was rightly past. Perhaps, perhaps . . . .

The strains of Bola Sete's "Guitar Lamento" reached John Henry's ears, the dark South American sorrow strangely his own, somehow right. It was with great difficulty his mind accepted that it was he who was playing it.

His emotion had spread throughout his being, into his hands which touched his guitar unknowing and gave voice to his heart. And the beauty of his sorrow gave him strength.

The song finished. John Henry put aside his guitar and found in his head the words of an obscure poet of the late 1900s; although he had only read the poem in passing, long before, the words came forth—

"for the days—
When enemies
  had faces
Before relativity
  captured the heart
  and locked it securely
  up in the brain
Already rotting
  from too much
  too soon.

for the days—
  of Right
When light
  in the heart
  turned body
  to spirit
A bright candle flame
  in the wind.
for the days—
When vision was clear
The Captain
  with luminant stars
Not yet lost

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in the seas
of time.

Oh David—
You never crouched
in the dark
Wondering
if Goliath
wasn't just
Doing a job
for a cause that
after all
might be as
worthy as yours."

The room was silent. For a moment John Henry was not sure he had spoken and played; it seemed something which might have occurred in his mind alone.

But there came applause, sustained and earnest, comprehending.

Aurora Borealis, the northern lights, leapt into the room, swirling, brilliant, dazzling—as seen from the Arctic winter night. Then closer and closer, and finally within . . . .

John Henry played Powell and Lennon and McCartney, and Pouchini; he did scenes from Shakespeare and Gardner and Lyman; he recited Lorca and Kipling and Twain, and even the Gettysburg Address, and the preamble to the Star-Peace Agreement of Worlds. The Experience Machine brought in the World Company Ballet; it mixed a symphony of the greatest musicians of two hundred years; it took the audience into fires and earthquakes, into the womb itself, and to the super-nova of a sun. It strung a high-wire act over the tables and patrons themselves; but John Henry balanced on one leg and juggled three cocktail glasses and somehow captured the audience away.

John Henry chipped and wore at the machine; he poked fun, and applauded, and spoke from his soul. And slowly the audience turned to him. Slowly they tired of being astonished and dazzled and having their breath taken away; they were like rich children finally done with too much candy and cake, turning to apples and homemade bread.

John Henry could feel the audience with him but it was late and he was tired; the machine was not. He searched through himself for a finale, a final statement on which to rest his case.

"John Henry was
a li'l baby,
uh-huh,
Sittin' on his
mama's knee,
oh, yes,
He picked up a
hammer and a
little piece of steel,
Said, 'Hammer's gonna be
the death of me . . .
Lawd, Lawd,
hammer gonna be
the death of me.' "

The song came from deep in John

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Henry's memory, a childhood song he had loved, perhaps because he shared his name with its hero.

"Well now every
Monday mornin', uh-huh,
When the bluebirds
begin to sing . . . ,
You can see John Henry
out on the line,
You can hear John Henry's
hammer ring . . .
Lawd, Lawd, you can hear
John Henry's hammer ring."

The steady boogie picked up the crowd and pulled it into the song; they began to clap rhythmically, a few to sing.

"Cap'n says to John Henry,
huh, huh,
'Gonna bring me a
steam drill 'round . . .
Gonna take that steam drill
out on the job,
Gonna wop that steel
on down . . .
Lawd, Lawd, gonna wop
that steel on down.'

John Henry tol'
the Captain, oh, my,
Lightnin' was
in his eye . . .
'Cap'n, bet yo' las'
red cent on me,
For I'll beat it
to the bottom
or I'll die . . .
Lawd, Lawd, I'll beat it
to the bottom
or I'll die.' "

Every person in the crowd was singing; they were clapping their hands and stamping their feet. The crowd belonged to John Henry. All he had to do was bring them home.

"John Henry started
on the right hand, yes,
The steam drill started
on the lef'—
'Before I'd let this
steam drill beat me down,
I'd hammer my fool self
to death . . .
Lawd, Lawd, I'd hammer
my fool self to death.'
White man tol'
John Henry, oh, oh,
'Nigger, damn your soul . . .
You might beat this
steam drill of mine,
When the rocks
in this mountain
turn to gold . . .
Lawd, Lawd, when the rocks
in this mountain
turn to gold.' "

John Henry picked up the tempo of the song. The crowd came with him, joyfully. They were racing now, racing for the finish line.

"John Henry said
to the shaker, uh-huh,
'Nigger, why don't
you sing . . . ?
I'm throwin' twelve poun's

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from my hips on down,
Jes' listen to that
col' steel ring . . .
Lawd, Lawd, jes' listen
to that col' steel ring.' ''

The silver cloud began to glow; lights flashed along the computers. John Henry Roberts appeared in the cloud, singing, playing, his face alive with the moment. The crowd was in the cloud too, clapping, stamping their feet.

John Henry, the real John Henry, did not notice himself at the far end of the room; he was too engrossed in his song. Only a few patrons stopped clapping and began to watch the cloud at first.

''Man that invented
the steam drill, yeah,
Thought he was mighty fine,
yes he did,
But John Henry drove
near fifteen feet,
And the steam drill
hammered only nine . . .
Lawd, Lawd, the steam drill
hammered only nine.''

Still John Henry was oblivious to his own image within the cloud, competing. A few more people turned away.

''John Henry tol'
the Cap'n, oh, yes,
'Look yonder
what I see . . .
Yo' drill's done broke
and yo' hole's done choke,
And you can't
drive steel like me . . .
Lawd, Lawd, you can't
drive steel like me.' ''

At last John Henry noticed his own image in the silver cloud. With a few exceptions, the entire crowd had turned to watch it, fascinated.

''John Henry was hammerin'
on the mountain,
And his hammer
was flashin' fire.
He drove so hard
'till he broke his heart,
And he lied down
his hammer and died . . .
Lawd, Lawd, he lied down
his hammer and he died.''

The entire crowd, save Ramón, was watching John Henry and itself in the silver cloud. They no longer clapped or sang or stamped their feet; but their images within the cloud did.

''Well now every
Monday mornin'
When the bluebirds
begin to sing . . .
You can see John Henry
out on the line,
You can hear John Henry's
hammer ring . . .
Lawd, Lawd, you can hear
John Henry's hammer ring.''

John Henry stopped playing and sat quietly on his stool but the image in the silver cloud played on. ★

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SON OF READER SURVEY

Remember that reader survey we ran several months ago? The results were interesting, to say the least. You're an interesting bunch of people—so much so that we want to know even more about you. So here goes!

1. How long do you keep each issue of GALAXY? Just long enough to read it once —— Up to three months —— Up to six months —— A year —— Longer (specify) ——

2. If you're one of those who keeps GALAXY around for a while, how many times do you go back to read something in it during the first six months? ——

3. Do you loan out your copies of GALAXY to anyone? —— If so, about how many people read your copy? —— Do you get your copy *back*? ——

4. Do you buy other science fiction magazines?—— If so, how many? —— Do you trade GALAXY with friends for other magazines? ——

5. About how many hardcover science fiction books do you buy a year —— Borrow from libraries or friends? —— About how many paperbacks bought? —— borrowed? ——

Please send all responses to:

GALAXY (Reader Survey)
720 White Plains Road
Scarsdale, N.Y. 10583

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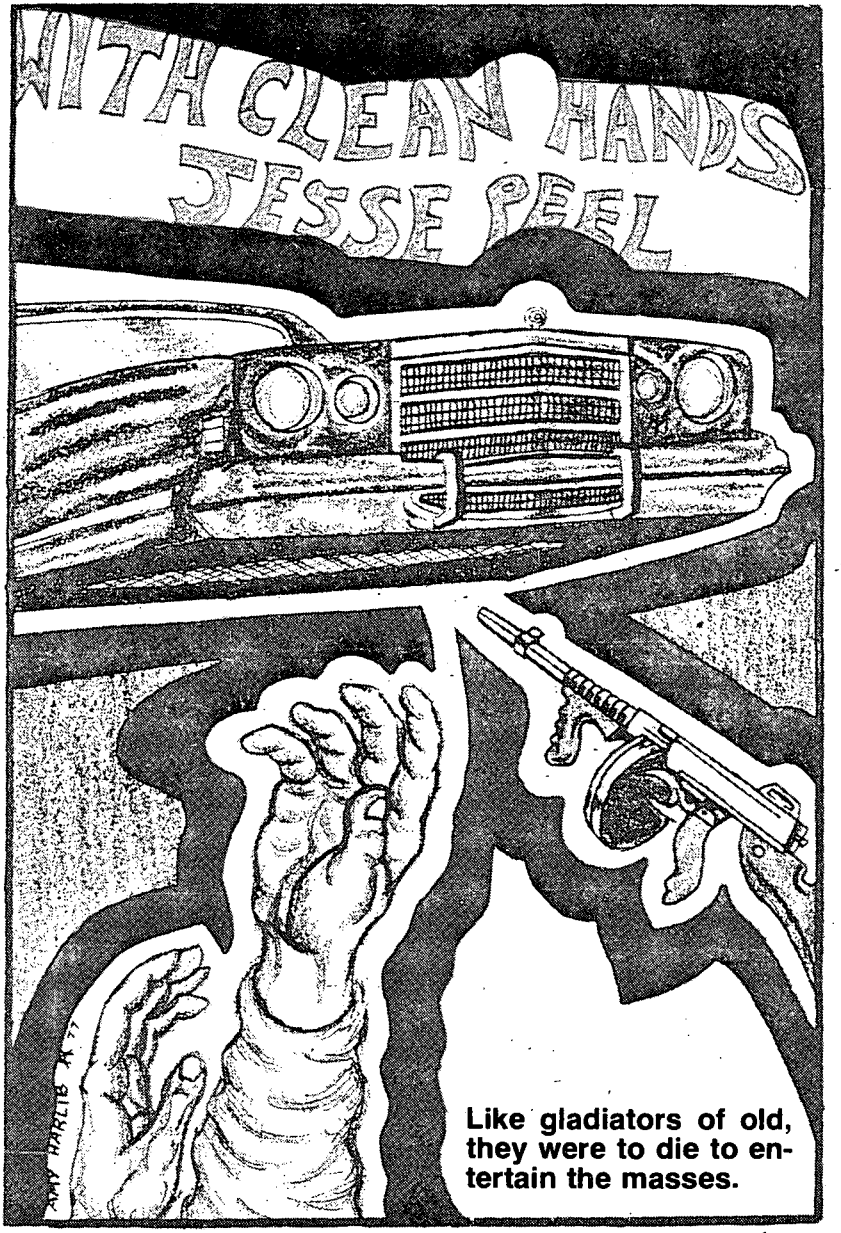

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DEATH ROW at the state prison at Angola is the most democratic one I've been on: the inmates themselves get to choose who rides and who stays home by a very simple method, and a very old one—we draw straws. Short straw loses. If he survives his run, he usually gets to sit out the next three or four draws. How many bys he gets depends on how many cons are roosting on the Row. Fewer men, fewer bys, naturally.

Still, it's a good system. Some joints, you get yourself on the guard's list and you don't last a month. He'll keep you at it until you lose.

Last drawing, I had the short straw. Too bad, but not unexpected; there were only ten of us left on the Row, and since I had been out of action for nearly three months, I was due. I couldn't really complain.

Actually, I wasn't all that worried. Lately we had been riding against Mississippi State, a bunch of tyro first-timers, and we were six-for-seven. Unless they came up with something better than what they'd been fielding, it was going to be a milk-run.

Besides, the field, Brusly, was in our territory: we were familiar with it; the out-of-state boys weren't—and the terrain took some getting used to.

Brusly was an old river town. Back in '81 or '82 a chemical plant blew out and a five-kilometer chlorine cloud rolled into town one morning and wiped out two thousand people. The few survivors were evacuated shortly thereafter, and Brusly was officially declared a Ghost a few years later. Later still, it became a site of the "executions."

So I had the advantages: home field and experience. But I still wasn't looking forward to it. Win or lose, it was bad. Sometimes I wondered if winning wasn't worse.

Saturday morning, an hour before I was due to leave, Bent-nose, the guard, dropped the bad news on me. "It ain't Mississippi you goin' up against today," he drawled, grinning.

I was surprised. "What? Who, then?"

"St. Gabriel."

"St. Gabriel?" I echoed, like an idiot. That was the women's cage. "Damn!"

Bent-nose laughed, and I swore again, but not for the reason he must have thought. A woman rider didn't bother me like it did some guys. But St. Gabriel was tough. They had three aces over there. Worse, Brusly was closer to them than us, and they had used it more.

"Who's the driver?" I asked, trying to sound casual.

"Now you know I ain't supposed to tell you that!" He grinned bigger, enjoying my discomfort.

"Come on, you've got credits riding on me, don't you?"

"Usually Ah do."

"But not this time?"

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He shrugged, and that worried me. If Bent-nose was betting on the opposition, then things were bad. Likely I would be up against one of the aces. I was just shy of being an ace myself—but if he was betting on her. . . .

I started walking back to my cell.

"Well, since you are riding for 'gola. . ." he began.

I turned back to look at him, knowing he just wanted to watch me squirm. I'd drop dead before I'd give the sadistic bastard the pleasure. I said nothing, waiting. Finally he knew I wasn't going to ask again.

"Kan Rela."

I shrugged, as if it meant nothing, and turned away. Let him get his kicks somewhere else. But my stomach was roiling like a snake just beheaded.

Kan Rela. I knew of her all right. First woman ace. First woman with ten cars. First and only woman double ace. I was in trouble: she was a killer.

On the other hand, I wasn't. Oh, sure, I had killed other riders, but that was different—that was self-defense. My original death-sentence was a frame, though. I hadn't killed that cop-op. I knew who did, but I also knew it was safer to keep my mouth shut. Or so I had thought at the time. I'd been wrong, of course.

I was a thief, and a good one. But not a killer. I tried to tell them that, but nobody wanted to hear it. They needed murderers. Anything capital would do. There was no one else who could play the game for them. Oh, there were plenty of straights who would do it, for the money or for the kicks, but the law wouldn't let its "honest" citizenry kill each other off on national holovision.

But who gave a fuck about a condemned murderer?

Here was good old American know-how, and clean hands, too: have the trash kill each other and entertain at the same time.

We were bigger than football had ever been. I even got fan letters.

Somebody must have had credits riding on me, though. They had fitted out the Teitaro—the best we had. I felt a little better. Some of the cars were real turtles. The Teitaro was our best, both in arms and speed. At least I'd be even in machinery.

The Teitaro, slightly bigger than an old three-wheeled motorcycle, is a standard air-cushion compact, except for a 5 cm. thick kleersteel dome, side-mounted 9mm machine guns and thick body armor. It only had two really vulnerable spots: the butane tank in the belly, which is pretty well covered by the ground, and a dime-sized hole in the dome at the driver's eye level. Right between the eyes, to be exact.

The hole is for the audience; head wounds bleed so nicely on color holovision. It makes for such dramatic viewing when a con's head explodes behind all that protection.

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★ ★ ★

We got to Brusly before the opposition, and after checking the car out, the crew locked me inside.

Most straights don't know about that, the locking-in part. The videoeyes are always somewhere else when that happens, but the flush-and-invisible bolt, which can only be opened from the outside, is why we don't just drive off into the sunset. Straights think we fight because we're killers, or brave, or whatever. Not because we have no choice.

Inside the Teitaro, I ran through the instrument checks. All these Japanese cars were built for midgets; my 185 cm. frame always felt cramped. Both knees bumped the crashboard and a tight turn could slam an elbow into the side-switches, easily firing a gun accidentally. Still, it was the best we had and I was willing to give up some comfort for better handling. Uncomfortable-alive was better than comfortable-dead.

The crew pushed me off just inside the fence on the highway to Plaquemine, and I took off straight for the River Road. It paralleled the levee, and I was used to the area. I headed for Twin Trees.

Three kilometers from the fence I heard the guns click as they armed themselves. Yeah. Within three kilos of the fence they were useless. Otherwise, there might be an awful lot of dead guards.

They didn't leave a lot to chance, did the warders. There was no way out: the fans killed automatically after twenty seconds over water, so the river was no escape and the fences not only cut the guns, they killed the fans if a car got within twenty meters. And they were electrically charged: even if a con did manage to get up enough speed to crash the fence, he'd be fried for his trouble.

Then there were the videoeyes—two for each car, not to mention Christ knows how many robot guards patrolling outside the wire. End run at the wire and river junction was out, too. The fence extended into the water on pilings for at least a thirty-second flight. Too long.

Riders didn't run. They fought or the other guy killed them. Or the other woman.

Twin Trees was just past the old power-line tower, and I figured to hide out in the garage of the Stone House and pull an ambush.

The Stone House must have been built after the levee: houses which pre-dated it were all raised a meter or two for the annual spring flood. The Stone House, because it sat firmly on the ground, provided better cover—and it was practically bullet-proof.

I didn't know how long I'd have before she showed. I could hear the damned videoeyes buzzing over the garage, and I cursed them. My hope was that the many pecan trees in the back yard would obscure them

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enough so that she wouldn't spot them. There was nothing I could do to get rid of them.

Once I had shot an 'eye down. That's not easy to do because the sideguns are fixed—they don't elevate. Looking straight ahead, the two streams converge on what you see dead-ahead at about thirty meters. Audiences like their action close. Anyway, I had taken my car up and down the side of the levee several times, until one of the cameras had gotten in front of me. When I started climbing again, I had enough angle, and I enjoyed the hell out of blasting it. It cost me two weeks in the hole, but I'd do it again, except that now they're programmed to stay out of the firing line.

My air conditioner kicked off and on several times. Even though I was parked in the shade, the air was hot and muggy. I could smell the flowers and overgrown grasses, and I could hear the faint buzzing of insects—and videoeyes.

Nice day to die, I thought. Sure.

The buzzing of my videoeyes seemed louder suddenly, and then I realized why—it wasn't just mine. I spotted another one passing in front of the open garage doorway. Then it stopped moving, and hovered, twenty-five meters up.

I took a deep breath and hit the push fans hard. She must know where I am, I thought. And here I was a sitting duck, surprise gone.

She was just off the road, and I got by so quickly that her first burst missed entirely, not even close.

She corrected with her side fans and began tracking me. I watched in the rear-viewer as the slugs chewed up the ground behind me, making a trail toward the rear of the Teitaro. But the car was picking up speed, and in a few seconds I was climbing the hill-like dike that was the Mississippi River levee. She'd have to chase me.

There was no time to see. I had to get ready for my trick when I crested the top. There! I killed the left side fans and goosed those on the right. I was a good meter up, due to my speed, and the car did a quick spin. When I was at 180° from my sprint, I killed the other side fans, and leaned all my weight forward. The nose of the Teitaro pitched downward, and I was in perfect position to hit anything behind me.

Only nothing was. Automatically I fired a quick burst before I realized that she wasn't there. Too bad.

Normally that would have been a good move, to tail me up the levee, hoping for a shot at my tank when I crested. The spin had put me into a good angle for a head-shot. I figured that I could rattle her before she realized that she was in a good position for a head shot, too.

Wrong. And worse, she was climbing parallel to me, thirty meters away. When she reached the top, she spun her car—a Volvo

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Striker—just as I had done. Just a quarter-turn. Dead on my left side.

I heard the guns chatter and felt the ping-ping of the slugs rattle off my dome. I boosted my rears fans to full and took off down the side of the levee. Not much chance of her doing any damage from that angle, but it did hurt my ego. I thought I'd pulled a sharp move and she had avoided it easily.

Her car had slightly less speed than mine but a quicker turning cycle, and that should have made us about equal. Like knight or bishop in chess.

I started behind the Stone House again, when my comset came on. She decided to talk.

"Nice try," she said. A nice-sounding voice, but hard to determine much from it. She could have been twenty or fifty, beautiful or ugly.

"Thanks," I said dryly. "Not good enough though, was it?"

"You're still alive, aren't you?"

True. She was an ace, a double ace yet, and I was still breathing the air. That was good, unless she was just playing games.

I had the house between us now, and I couldn't see her.

"Welcome to Wonderland," I said. "Enjoy the rides—fun and games!"

They can broadcast the com conversations, but I knew from my own experience watching the HV on the Row that they seldom do. Tape-delay of six seconds is too slow to keep up with the action, if there is any, and live 'casts are out of the question.

You never knew what some crazy con might say—especially if he knew that 300 million people might hear it on live holovision. They'd monitor, but they wouldn't send it out.

"I don't suppose you'd like to quit and call it a draw?" I said.

"Love to—but. . . ."

"Sure. Try it, and they zap us both. Just a thought." I'd wondered before just what they would do if both contestants refused to fight. I wasn't that interested in finding out. This way, I had a chance.

She stopped talking, and I decided it was a good time to move. Keeping the house between me and the levee, I backed off toward the pecan trees.

She must have climbed the levee again to get up speed, because when she flew by the house, she must have been hitting sixty-five—sideways, no less. Her chances of snuffing me at that speed were slim, but it was impressive.

I had the advantage. I was set in the trees, and I tracked her. I even managed to bounce a couple of rounds off her car. No damage, but I felt a hell of a lot better. At least she wasn't unhittable.

I'd never have caught her so I didn't try; she had too much speed going. When she was nearly a kilometer away, into the cow pasture, I called.

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"Not bad," I said, trying to sound unafraid.

"Thanks. That was pretty good shooting."

"Um."

"Now that we know we can both drive," she said, "shall we get down to it?" She sounded calm; it made me nervous. I punched in the rear fans and headed back to the levee. There was a flat side on the river bank that had a lot of trees and bushes for cover. Even a few small ponds.

"Where'd you go?" she asked. Her voice sounded very distant. Must be at nearly the two-kilometer limit of the comset, I thought. Good. That would give me plenty of time to find a place to get set. The videoeyes wouldn't be specific enough to give me away in all that brush, I thought. I wondered why I hadn't done that in the first place. On the other hand, if I were a genius, I wouldn't have been there.

"I'm around," I said. "Don't worry."

"Who, me?" she said faintly.

Still off in the distance, I thought.

Wrong. She came over the levee like a bomb, almost on top of me. Damn! How could she get here that fast?

Because she was here all along, stupid, said a voice inside my head. Didn't you ever think of lowering your voice to make it seem like you were far away? No, come to think of it, I hadn't.

Crap. I was outclassed, pure and simple, and she had me dancing seven ways to somewhere.

The angle was not good enough for either of us to shoot, and she tore by so close that I could have almost touched her.

A flash of a look: young, maybe thirty—my age. Brown hair, cut short. Not a pretty face, but handsome in its own way. And grim. And scared. Amazing how much you can see in a brief instant.

I got tangled up in my controls, and my spin was too slow to track her. I almost killed my left side fan, but I finally managed to get the Teitaro around, cursing all the while.

She was over the water, swinging in a wide turn. Crazy! I started counting.

It was going to be close. At seventeen, she was still off-shore. She passed out of my line of sight behind the trees at nineteen. If she hit the water, she'd sink like a rock, and she'd drown quickly. The cars were not water-tight, and even if they were, there'd be nobody who'd come to pull her out.

But she made it. The comset blared a good ten seconds after she should have been in the water.

"You still there, Del?"

So she knew my name. "Still here, Kan Rela."

For some insane reason, I was glad she hadn't gone down. That didn't make any sense, but I was glad anyway.

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"You're not too bright, playing over the river like that!"

"What else could I do? I'd have been boxed between the trees otherwise. You'd have creamed me."

I was glad she couldn't see my face. With the clumsiness of my turn, I hadn't had a prayer of touching her. I was glad she didn't know that. At least she was giving me credit for being dangerous. Of course that meant that she wouldn't do anything reckless. A shame.

"Del?"

"Yeah."

"You've killed five, right?"

"Yeah."

"That's not counting the one they sent you up for?"

"A frame."

A pause. Then, "Really?"

"Yeah. Why should I lie? One of us is going to be dead soon; what difference does it make?"

"That's too bad," she said quietly.

I didn't know if she was sorry that one of us was going to be dead, or that I'd been framed. Maybe both.

"And you?" I asked.

"He was my husband."

I said nothing, waiting.

"He was beating me, and I fought back. He hit his head."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It was eight years ago. I've gotten over it."

Eight years! Christ, what was it like to be on Death Row for eight years? I was only a two-year man, and I felt like I was older than the world sometimes. Eight years! I felt sorry for her. And myself.

I had the fans on low so that I could creep around the bushes without stirring up too much dirt. I nosed around a large shrub, and there she was, broadside to my guns and unaware of me.

I opened up with both guns. It was not a good angle. I needed a rear shot or head shot to do any real destruction. But the ground was probably too soft to bounce any slugs into her tank from the rear, and she was too good for me to chance head-to-head. I saw the tracers, every tenth round, spark off her clear dome. But only for a second. She jerked her eyes around to look at me, and then she was gone.

Now or never, I thought. I swung the car out and followed her into the brush. I planned to latch onto her tail and stay there until I could get her.

It was a mistake. She wasn't there. I looked frantically around, and soon found where she'd gone.

She was on *my* tail!

Bad news. The sweat was pouring off me, off the air conditioner. Somebody as good—no, *better*—then me was on me, and I knew I couldn't shake her. I had a sudden flash of realization. She was going to beat me. I was going to die.

I could hear her bullets hammering on the back of my car, but I couldn't think of anything to do

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about it. I don't remember the actual motions; my mind was a blank.

I must have slammed all my fans into reverse. There was a screech of protesting metal, a shredding sound of plastic, a jolt that slammed me into the crashboard and bounced my head off the kleersteel dome, and I stopped. Cold.

She wasn't expecting it. She tried to swerve and almost made it, she was that good. But the left edge of the Volvo caught the back of the Teitaro, and the force was enough to roll her completely—minus all the fan ducts on her left side.

I watched the whole thing in slow-motion, as if time had ceased to flow normally and had stretched out like taffy. She completed the roll, landed heavily against an oak tree. I saw her head jolted around. She must have been frantically working the controls, but she was getting no response. The Volvo wasn't going anywhere.

The Teitaro was damaged badly as well, but I still had a few fans working—I could move. Slowly I came to bear on the exposed underside of her car, jammed hopelessly against the tree. I had her, and there was nothing she could do about it, nothing. Good-bye, lady-ace.

I felt no joy, however. I hadn't really beaten her with skill, only luck and mindless desperation. And she wasn't really my enemy—she was as much a pawn as I was, an innocent victim. I couldn't even rationalize that she was a murderer. Killing her would only please my real enemies—the good people who had put us both here for their entertainment. The ones who were enjoying every minute of this, glued to holovisions across the country.

I could see her face, ten meters away, pale and defeated and looking at me.

"Congratulations," she said through the comset. "You win. Good-bye." And then she waved and closed her eyes and bowed her head.

Son-of-a-bitch! No! It was too much! I nursed the failing fans, pushing the car forward, to the other side. Good, the tree wasn't blocking my target!

She looked up, puzzled.

I began firing, swinging the front of my car back and forth in order to get hits from both sideguns. Too low. I backed the car up and tried again. Ah, better.

"What are you doing?" she said "Are you crazy? You can't hurt anything that way! There's nothing on that side, except. . ."

I grinned, knowing she could see me.

". . . the lock!" she finished.

I hoped it would give soon. My ammunition was getting low. A minute passed, two. My right sidegun went dry. Still nothing. Less than a hundred rounds remained in my left sidegun. Fifty. Then twenty.

The lever popped up, and a crack appeared in the nearly featureless

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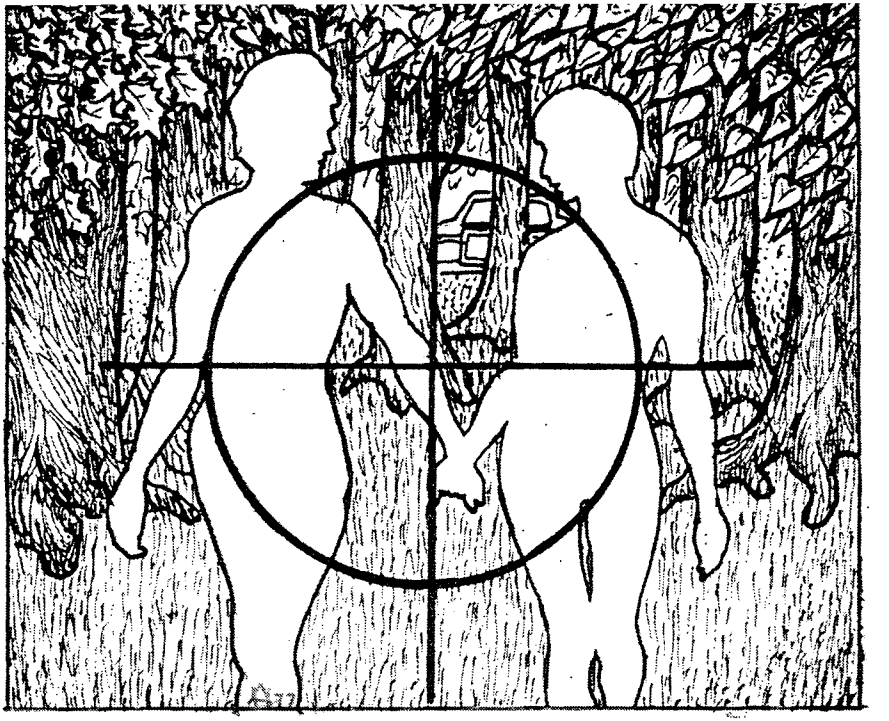

side of her car. I stopped firing. The lock was gone, the gull-wing door unlocked.

We sat quietly for a minute as the echoes of the machine gun died.

They had framed me and turned me into a killer. No matter how I rationalized it, that's what I had become. A killer. But not anymore. I looked at her face, and I knew that I couldn't play the game by their rules.

Her door opened, and with only a second's hesitation, she stepped out. Tall, slim, and wondering. Was I playing some new trick, a cruel joke for the audience to drool over?

She took a deep breath and began to walk toward me. My remaining gun was lined up perfectly, but I never even considered it.

It took only a second for her to flip the lever and let me out.

"Can you swim?" I asked, grinning.

"Sure. But our chances—"

"Are slim and snowball," I finished. I looked up at the videoeyes, still focused automatically on the two dead cars. And our dead past.

"They'll probably kill us," she said.

"Probably."

We grinned at each other and started for the river. It was a big river, but whatever the chances, it sure beat being a pawn, and hell, at least we'd cheat the audience. It was almost worth it for that alone. ★

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GALAXY BOOKSHELF

Paul Walker

The Silmarillion, J.R.R. Tolkien, 365 pp., Houghton Mifflin, 1977, $10.95
The Worlds of Theodore Sturgeon, 398pp., Ace Books, 1977 reissue, $1.50
The Siege of Wonder, Mark S. Geston, 190pp., DAW, 1976, reissued 1977, $1.50
Writing and Selling Science Fiction, the Science Fiction Writers of America, Writers Digest, 191pp. 1976, $7.95

Q. *Name three famous Orcs?*
A. *Joan of Orc, Noah's Orc, and Orc Linkletter*

PERTINENT QUESTIONS in reference to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion:*

Did you like it?

I loved it.

Is it as good as *Lord of the Rings?*

That's hard to answer flatly. I have read *LotR* twice, and lived with the memory of it for twenty years; while I have only just finished *The Silmarillion.* There is so much in it that should be taken into account in making an evaluation, and I am not a Tolkien scholar. But my very subjective impression is that it is better.

Both times I read *LotR* I had to push myself along to get through the first two books. I found a lot of

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it tedious. But I was never bored with *The Silmarillion* for a minute. It has so much charm and excitement; imagination and invention.

However, it is different than *Lot-R*. A narration rather than a dramatic narrative. It is not a novel, but a mythology. A long series of closely connected tales that form a history of the world from its beginnings. I can imagine some people being put off by this, bored, or disappointed. I found it delightful.

What is it about?

Three hundred and four pages, not counting the addenda.

There are five separate, but related, narratives. The first is the "Ainulindale," which recounts the story of the creation, not simply of the world, but of the three great "themes" that are to compose the scheme of things in times to come.

The second is the "Valaquenta." The theogony. Who's Who among the gods.

The third is the "Quenta Silmarillion," the epic story of the origin of the Elves, Dwarves, and what not, and how they left the protection of the Valar for Middle-Earth. Of how the god (more accurately, angel) Melkor fell into his evil ways to become the accursed Morgoth. His plans for conquest, his victories, his inevitable defeat. Of the Elvish heroes who were born to battle against him. The legendary cities they championed that fell before him one by one. Of the reconciliation of Elves and Valar. Of the passing of their reign and the rise of Men.

The fourth is the "Akallabeth." The fall of the mighty land of Númenor to the wily cunning of Sauron.

And finally, "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age," which is an attempt to synthesize the whole epic from beginning to the end of *LotR* and beyond.

There are very useful appendices to help the reader keep track of who is who and doing what; plus some excellent maps. I might recommend the reader look at the "Note on Pronunciation" before getting too far into the book, to help him pronounce the names correctly. There are hundreds of them, all mellifluous.

Do you have any favorites among the tales?

The story of Beren and Lúthien. Charming. The story of Tuor and his fight with the dragon. And Sauron's conquest of Númenor. Very spectacular. But I loved it all. A thoroughly entertaining book.

Any further comments?

I expect so much will be written about this book in years to come by fen who have studied it conscientiously that it seems futile for me to say anything more, but the curious thing about it is that, despite all the pleasure it gave to me, it has made me think less of Tolkien than I did before.

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He was neither a genius nor an original.

It is not that he was not a good writer. His prose is fine. But he is imitating pre-Christian literature with the intellect and imagination of a middle-class Victorian, and what is most poignant, most dramatic, and most profound in the former is utterly lacking in the latter.

The stories and themes of such as *Beowulf* and *The Wanderer* were derived from folk tales and reflected a universal spiritual point of view. Life was a terrible thing. Man was cursed with the impermanence of existence. Age was to be feared as much as any disease. Freedom was out of the question. Without his tribe or clan, a man was doomed. War was a way of life. Glory, an illusion. It was better that a man had never been born.

These were not the sentiments of a group of fashionably pessimistic writers catering to the neurotic tastes of their age. They are to be found everywhere in western literature and song for thousands of years.

And the same is true of fairy tales. The best deal with very fundamental concepts, such as hope and fear, with an almost childlike simplicity of technique. But none of this is true of Tolkien.

The reader is always aware of the high quality of the mind behind the invention. Not that Tolkien is given to Vonnegut-like cleverness, but neither is he capable of transcending his conventional 19th-century view of society to depict the universal human condition.

His characters are never more than human. Their motivations never more than familiar. Nor do his characters embody their motivations. It is not what Tolkien tells, or fails to tell, us about them that makes them less than archetypal; it is what they are—little Englishmen. And nothing more.

To the majority of people who read the *Odyssey* today, the fact that Odysseus is a Greek is of minor importance. Homer convinces us that he is Man. Or rather, an aspect of Man struggling against a hostile world. And the same is true of the monster Grendel. The embodiment of menace and malice. Everyman's bogeyman. But this is not true of Frodo or Fëanor or the Gollum or Sauron. At best, they are a Dickensian variety.

This is not to say that they are not pleasant characters to read about, or that Tolkien does not tell a wonderful story, but it is not more than a wonderful story. The essence of the greatness of the material is missing; those elements of the tragic and the terrible and the sensual that make the originals so potent a literature.

I cannot accuse him of "cuteness" as some have. His treatment of the elves and hobbits is affectionate rather than sentimental, but there is the element of "niceness," of gentility, in them

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all, even in the likes of Morgoth, that undermines their fairy-tale credibility. For all the pages of talk of the unmentionable evils to be found in the dungeons of Morgoth and Sauron, one knows there are things neither would stoop to. For instance—well, use your own imagination. Think of something evil. Then try to imagine it in Mordor.

The closest Tolkien comes to an unmentionable is in the story of Túrin and his love for Niniel. He has found her wandering in the woods, suffering from complete amnesia. He marries her, not knowing she is his sister. Eventually, they find out. They kill themselves. But whereas a Sophocles would have accompanied their fate with horrendous wailing and horror, Tolkien manages it with a stiffer-upper-lip decorum that I am confident no PTA will ever deny to school library shelves.

The cardinal sin in Tolkien's world, as in every other mythological invention, is Pride. But where in a Milton it is seen as a flaw of heroic dimensions that drives man to the madness of challenging the throne of Heaven, in Tolkien it is simply a kind of bad manners.

The sin of pride, to an Englishman, is a sin against one's class. It is the asserting of one's individual aspirations and ambitions over and against the collective order. An order, the English are firmly convinced, ordained, and sustained, by God himself. This is the sin of Morgoth. Not to be God, but to rule as himself over his own creation, his own order.

Naturally, he fails. In fact, he never had a chance of succeeding, for all his power, for the order of the world (the universe itself) is the will of God, absolute and immutable; and by failing to perceive this, or refusing to accept it, he defines himself as either a fool or a madman. Absolute creation is in the hands of God; a Morgoth can only corrupt what already exists.

Fëanor, the greatest of the Elves, like many a hero, falls into the same trap. He refuses to hand over

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his finest creation, the Silmarills, to the Valar for the welfare of the community. He refuses to accept his class's subordination to that of the aristocratic, angel-like Valar and takes them into exile where he immediately commits a peasant-like crime and is cursed.

Although the class structure is the same in the hierarchy of the gods, where Tolkien's differs is in their school-masterish rationality. An Apollo would have smashed a Fëanor to elvish mush for so much as giving him a dirty look, and repented his hastiness at leisure, but never a Valar. They are always as good as they are always just.

None of which is to be interpreted as an expression of my own prejudices against the English, of which I have none. I love the English. And I still love Tolkien. But *The Silmarillion*, like *LotR*, is to be seen for what it is: an English fairy tale about Englishmen. And nothing more.

> Theodore Sturgeon: 90% of science fiction is crap.
> Fact: Theodore Sturgeon writes science fiction.
> Conclusion: 90% of Theodore Sturgeon's science fiction is crap.

Two of the most interesting stories in *The Worlds of Theodore Sturgeon* concern young men who are highly talented, sensitive, and loving, but who are unable to succeed in the mundane world because of their neurotic personalities. After reading the nine stories in this inferior collection, I am inclined to think Sturgeon had himself in mind when he created them.

Everything that made Sturgeon one of the most influential sf writers of the late forties and fifties is here—the genuinely interesting mind, the sensitivity and compassion, the instinct for drama, the gentle humor, and the sense of the need for a careful balance between the human and scientific elements in an sf story. Yet for all the talent on display, not one of these stories is what it could have been.

In story after story, idea and emotion, drama and theme are buried under sloppy sentimentality, crude over-writing, and its related ill, diarrhea of the dialogue. All lack discipline—patience—that extra careful draft that would have been necessary to refine their difficult fictional elements. For what Sturgeon was trying to do was difficult indeed: to humanize the tradition of pulp science fiction without losing the tradition altogether. To relate the scientific and human elements of the story in such a way as to realize both of them dramatically. And to write science fiction as if it were poetry, a blend of vision and feeling; something that left the reader moved as much by one as by the other.

Simak is the one writer who comes to mind who accomplished

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this in Sturgeon's time, but since then it has become the main direction of almost all good science fiction. But where Simak, at his best, is careful, Sturgeon gives the impression that having the ideas in mind, he just sat down and wrote.

Frankly, I found most of these stories rather boring to re-read, but not entirely. That special Sturgeon quality still exerts its power through all the verbiage. But technically he seems most successful when he is most mischievious, as in "Shottle Bop," or "The Sky was Full of Ships." And to an extent in "The Perfect Host," which is really so old-fashioned I am embarrassed to admit I enjoyed it. I suspect it is the kind of story that sf writers can't get away with anymore. The kind written straight off the top of the head in the wee hours of the morning-when the writer is smashed out of his skull.

He is least successful here at his most interesting efforts, such as "The Graveyard Reader," which is sentimental and predictable, or in "The Other Man" and "Maturity," which are hideously crude and naive and sentimental and half-a-dozen other things, but interesting all the same.

Then there are a few antiques, such as "Memorial" and "The Skills of the Xanadu," which were not worth reprinting. In fact, it is curious that this book was reprinted. No one I spoke to at Ace knew who had selected the stories back in

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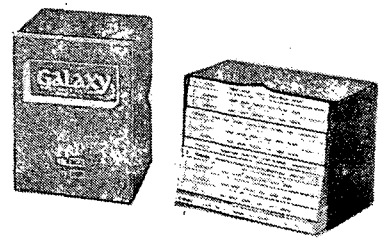

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1972; only that it had Sturgeon's blessing as a survey of his work from 1946 to 1962. What a shame if anyone believed that. Sturgeon has done better.

Your money would be better spent on *E Pluribus Unicorn* or *Caviar* or *Not Without Sorcery,* not to mention *More Than Human.* All are uneven, but all have a few stories that are better than any of these, and like other "uneven" sf writers such as Simak and Bradbury, Sturgeon's best will leave its mark on your soul.

Wearisome wizards and ho-hum homunculi

On the front cover of Mark S. Geston's *The Siege of Wonder,* just above the absolutely delightful illo by H.R. Van Dongen, Gerald Jonas of the *Times* is quoted as saying, "I liked this book very much," which puzzles me, because I did not like the book at all. I don't doubt Jonas' word; but that he liked it and I found it so cold and unentertaining makes me wonder if it was just a case of this not being my sort of book.

Years ago, I was impressed by Geston's first novel, *Lords of the Starship,* and the memory was revived by this one. The strangeness, the atmosphere, the ambiguity of the ending. All here. But none of the wonder, the mystery.

The Siege of Wonder is about the final days of a war between the forces of magic and those of science that has lasted seven hundred years. It seems to divide into three parts: the mission of Aden, an agent of the powerful Special Office, to implant a spying device in the eye of a unicorn; his return and affair with a magical maiden named Gedwyn; and the bi-lateral expedition of Aden and two Border Command scientists to the Holy City after the Wizards have been mysteriously vanquished by their own power.

The first is a sort of *Mission: Impossible* situation, which, like everything else in the book, just—happens. We are introduced to a not very interesting or personable hero who does his job with bland efficency, and then goes away. There is a fleeting moment of suspense in the church when his cohort implants the device, but as Geston disdains melodrama, it is gone as quickly as it came.

Aden then must travel hundreds of miles to get back to his own lines, but aside from once being watched momentarily by two masked men, it is a humdrum journey. He meets a beautiful girl with magical powers with whom he has an idyllic affair that for another fleeting moment made the book live. But then he and the moment go away again.

At that point I lost patience and never again really gave a damn, or was encouraged to care, what the rest of the book was about. Aden gets home, is debriefed, and recup-

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erates. Two new characters, as faceless and uninteresting as he, have what little dialogue there is in the book, discussing the war. Then it is discovered the wizards have mysteriously vanished. Aden sets out again to find Gedwyn and see the Holy City. The two scientist/soldiers go to see what has happened.

Had Geston brought it off, the remaining half of the book would have been a field day for all concerned, for he obviously gave a lot of thought to the scenes he describes of a land of magic in which the magic has died and the wondrous creatures that survive go painfully to their deaths. As it is, Geston seems so terrified of writing a single line of purple prose that everything is told, more often than shown, with a kind of grim matter-of-factness. A style that I found as hard to penetrate as any I have ever read.

As there are no characters to care about, so there is no conflict to get excited about. Things happen in series rather than in sequence. One is never sure until the end whom Geston is rooting for. Both sides appear equally unpleasant socially and politically. Most likely it is all a metaphor for the war between science and art, or intellect and imagination, or some such thing, but it is so abstract as to be irrelevant to my knowledge of this conflict. Geston's scientists are no more credible than his wizards.

All of this might have been forgivable if only Geston's wonders were wondrous. But they are not. Wizards, gryphons, fairy princesses, floating cities, etc., etc. It is simply not enough to say, "The Grand Wizard strode down the boulevard accompanied by his dragon, Lucille." One must see the grandness of the wizard and the fiercesomeness of the dragon. Stated matter-of-factly, it means less than nothing.

Geston had the talent and the brains and the ability. He simply chose to write another kind of book. One that did not appeal to me at all. It did appeal to Jonas though, so perhaps there are other people out there who will find more in *The Siege of Wonder* than I did. If so, I would be curious to know what.

Porkbarrel Prose

How many "How to Write" books have I read over the past twenty years? A dozen? Two dozen? How many of them were really worthwhile? One? Two? One I would swear by; another I would recommend as supplementary reading. The rest were all, "Well, you know, the way I do it is. . . ." Such books and articles depress me, but whether for the readers or the writers I am not sure.

There are three kinds of "How to Write" books. First, texts—with diagrams and exercises, most of

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which only demonstrate how hard it is to explain the obvious. Second, advice books—filled with "tips." And, third, anecdotal autobiographical accounts of a particular writer's career masquerading as a text. Some of these are good. I especially recommend Patricia Highsmith's *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*. It will teach you nothing about plotting or writing but it will tell you all sorts of things about the wonderful mind of a talented novelist.

Writing and Selling Science Fiction by "The Science Fiction Writers of America" is an advice book. There are eleven essays by the likes of Poul Anderson, Jerry Pournelle, Kate Wilhelm, James Gunn, George R.R. Martin and andy offutt. As such books go, it isn't bad. The Anderson piece on "Nomenclature in Science Fiction" is a delight. Pournelle on building future worlds is interesting. Wilhelm on characterization is accurate and succinct. In fact, just about everybody is mercifully concise and nobody makes a jackass of him/herself.

C.L. Grant writes an intelligent and useful introduction and andy offutt gleefully teels us how to sock it to the IRS. The rest of the articles were largely redundant.

If you know anything about writing, the book is not going to tell you anything you do not already know. If you know little or nothing about it, it is not going hurt you. But novices should be warned to approach such books with caution. Their usefulness is less in the advice they impart (which could as easily be found in a writer's magazine) than in the *attitudes* they encourage. Professionals take a lot for granted. Writing is a skill that is more absorbed than learned, and ideas that seem simple commonsense to the sf writer are often difficult concepts for anyone else to grasp. The reason is that they cannot take into account the factor of their talent.

Consequently, a Kate Wilhelm can make the very high art of characterization seem child's play: "You just sit down and ask yourself—"

Professionals have a better idea of the attitudes involved in their success but these attitudes are still generally vague. They cannot be truly explained. They have to be understood by exposure—by listening in on professional minds at work, for example—and a casual reading of a book like this will not give it to the novice. He has to first empty his mind of chicken fat and then meditate upon what he is absorbing.

Unfortunately there is much chicken fat in these essays. We should have a right to expect better from the SFWA. But what there is of sane and sensible attitudes here should be of some use. I would not recommend this book but I would not discourage anyone from it either. ★

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OKAY, GEIS. What did ol' J.J.P. say when he called? And how come he didn't ask for me?

"Well, Alter, he spoke as if you were a mere literary device, a simple figment of my imagination. He had no idea that dealing with you and your tantrums would eventually drive him into another editorial position just as it drove Jim Baen to Ace Books."

I am *not* difficult to work with, as you should know, Geis. I am the soul of reasonableness, the zenith of cooperation, the apex of . . . of—

"Bitchiness."

Bitchi—Listen, stop denigrating me. You'll give the new editor of GALAXY a wrong—

"Right!"

—impression of me. Now, what did J.J. Pierce have to say?

"Oh, the general new-editor hope for improvement and desire to do the best he could. Also, he said he wanted the column as long as we were willing to write it."

He did? Very shrewd man. I will not disappoint him. Even though I am running rather short of ideas for the column.

"Why don't you appeal to the readers for help, Alter? Suggest they send in topics they'd like you and me to discuss. Have them send in direct questions."

I have a column for this time but . . . say, I'll ask my thousands of readers to send in suggestions for future columns and to ask questions

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they'd like me to answer.

"Alter!"

Yeah . . . that'll bring in feedback, give everybody a sense of participation and make my work easier. What do you think Geis?

"I think . . . I think—"

I knew you'd approve. So that's what I'll do. Readers out there! You! Stop picking your nose and stop half-thinking about that stacked/hung girl-boy next door! If there's some topic or idea or aspect of sf you'd like Geis and me to argue about, send it in. Got a question you'd like answered about him or me? Send it in. Send it to Geis & Alter, P. O. Box 11408, Portland, Oregon 97211.

"We'll be lucky to get three letters, Alter. And the suggestions will likely be obscene and anatomically impossible."

For you, Geis, but not for me. I enjoy it.

"Not with *my* body, you don't!"

Don't be a sorehead.

"It's not my head that'll be sore!"

Nevertheless, the invitation to the readers is genuine. Let's see what happens.

* *Grump* *Mutter**

Now, onward to the body of this column, I'd like to talk about science fiction for—

"For a change?"

—openings.

"Get your mind off of sex, Alter."

Geis! Will you stop hectoring me? Just stop it! Lay off now. I've got something important to say.

"That'll be the day. What could *you* have in that tendrilled head that could be important?

Listen, and be convinced of my superiority. Now I've watched you begin reading a new sf novel or a story, read a couple of paragraphs, become bemused, distracted, irritated, angered, enraged, furious, apoplectic, and finally throw the book or magazine across the room while shouting a vile oath, an imprecation even.

"Yes . . . that happens all too often. I find the technique of most sf writers to be so abysmal—especially the elementary technique involved in opening lines and paragraphs—that I turn into a cursing monster."

Exactly. Your self-control—

"And I've seen you do it too, Alter. First your eyes glint, then you mutter alien words under your breath, then your tendrils stiffen and turn pink, deepening in color to livid crimson. Finally, eyes glittering, you tense and your right arm shoots forward with the book or magazine and the offending publication rockets through the air to either hit the wall or impact in the woodbox next to the stove, where I have to salvage it for future reference.

All right, let's get to the meat of what I'm trying to say. While I was rummaging around in your memory cells, I came across a lot of recall from books and magazines devoted to fiction writing and magazines

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you'd read in your youth. "How to Write Fiction." "How to Grab Readers," "The Critical First Paragraph." Things like that. You read years of WRITER'S DIGEST, all Jack Woodford's books on writing and—

"They made an indelible impression, Alter, and by applying that knowledge, I managed to sell my first serious commercial story to ADAM in 1959 and about a hundred others in the following few years, while starting to write novels in nineteen sixty. Sold my first eighty-nine novels with only three or four rejections along the way."

Stop bragging. I'm trying to make point. The point is that the first two or three paragraphs of a story are crucial. The point is that a reader will stick with a writer that long, but damn few any longer without being intrigued or hooked by some fiction dynamic death, danger, sex, power, money. We've seen people browsing at newsstands. A cover or a title or a writer's name will impel a reader to pick the book or magazine off the rack for further investigation. The reader will read for a few seconds here and there . . . and a few people will even read the last page before deciding whether to purchase or not.

"Alter, I view people who read the endings of stories before reading the entire story as creatures benighted by fate, a breed of mental masochists, a perverted variety of—"

Oh, shut up, Geis! What I want to do here is to underline the importance of making the reader *want* to read the next line. From the first line to the last line. And I'll present some good and bad examples of opening sequences of current novels.

"Alter, your concern for your fellow sf writers is marvelous. I'm sure they'll thank you for giving them lessons in public and for pointing out their flaws, faults and failings. They'll pat you on the head with blunt instruments!"

Nevertheless, Geis, I will persist in my crusade to improve the lot of the sf reader. Let me begin. I am going to quote the first paragraph of an sf novel published in nineteen seventy-seven: then I will have a comment and then I will identify it and its writer. Okay?

"No!"

Fine. Here is the quote:

> Moving faster than the dawn, the shuttle from the orbiting cruiser *Realta* might have been seen, by the sharpest of those eyes that watched from the landing station, as a flash of light, preceding, by just a few seconds, the first brilliance of Sigma-G53 as it began to rise above the eastern horizon. With the new day came the wind; an unobtrusive breeze at first, it rose, as the sun climbed higher, into a biting gale that flung the countryside

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into a frenzy of unwelcomed activity. It shook the tiny landing station with its human and native occupants, until both man and alien looked to each other for moral comfort and a reassurance that they would not at any moment be flung across the hills—with concrete base, windproofed towers and docked ships following in a turmoil of destructive energy.

Doesn't that opening paragraph with its dense, ill-structured sentences, malaprop metaphor and dumb content—doesn't it make you itchy to read on? I especially liked where human and alien looked to each other for *moral* support. Where's the morality of anything involved? The author wanted to say that a very strong wind usually accompanied sunrise on this alien planet and it made people and natives wonder if they'd survive. But they obviously *had* survived, for generations. And the space station too, for decades or more. What we have is author overkill, ineptitude and careless thinking.

I never did get past the third paragraph. The author had demonstrated he was a klutz at fiction and nothing indicated any compensating talent for dialogue or characterization or sense of wonder. It would have been a very dreary read so—

"You threw it across the room, eh, Alter?"

Right. For those who may want to know who and what, the quote is from *Eye Among the Blind* by Robert P. Holdstock. (Doubleday, $6.95.)

"Are you now going to give us an example of a very *good* opening for an sf novel?"

Of course. But fine opening paragraphs are preferred for *any* story of any type, of any genre. For a good one, all you have to do is reach for the nearest Ron Goulart book. Thus, in his recent *The Emperor of the Last Days* (Popular Library, $1.50, 1977.) we have:

The man plummeted straight down past Dan Farleigh's only window.

"Hey!" Dan had been chatting with his central computer. He only got a flashing impression of the silently screaming man out of the corner of his eye.

"Only some guy doing the Dutch," said the computer's voice box. "Nothing to—"

"He must have jumped from some office directly above this one." Dan was running toward the oval plexiwindow.

Police aircruisers were already hooting someplace below when the long lanky young man got across the huge, high and hollow Fax-Central Office to take a look out.

"I can see him sprawled on a pedramp at about level thirty-two," said Dan, craning his neck and pressing his forehead against

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the soft, tinted window. The walkramps and towering buildings of Manhattan made multicolored zigzag patterns across the morning . . . .

Needless to say, Geis, that opening line got me and the swift, information-laden sentences that followed drew me along, painting a picture of the city, the technology, the central character. Bloody marvelous, Goulart's technical skill is incredible.

"But, Alter, he never seems to apply this virtuosity to a heavy, serious, important novel. All he deals in is formula with a dash—sometimes a flagon—of satire."

That's his affair, Geis. We are not here to critique successful writers' careers and choices of material. I will now use an opening quote from a long-time sf writer whose name will carry his readers through a dull sequence—because they trust him. The quote:

> Five of them were seated about the central table of the recreation room. In name it was the recreation *hall*, but it just wasn't as big as all that. Bring up a dozen visiting firemen, plus the three-man crew of the spacecraft, and the place was packed. However, it was a reasonably charming room, made livable with paintings and other art, complete with comfortable furniture, a well-stocked bar, Tridi television, and of all things, a ping-pong table. Ping-pong took a bit of getting used to in these parts; for that matter, even a card game could take some getting used to.
>
> They were, reading from left to right, Mary Lou Pickett, American; Kingsley Brett-James, Englishman; Max Zimmerman, Israeli; Li Ching, Chinese; and Azikiwe Awolowo, Nigerian. They spoke to each other in Esperanto, for policy reasons, though all knew English, and each of them liked each of the others as much as they had ever liked anyone. They had to; it was a matter of survival.
>
> They were playing Liar's Dice, once-favorite of the Royal Air Force when the chips were down during the Battle of Britain.
>
> Max Zimmerman shook the dice cup with a flourish, banged it down on the table and peered beneath the edge, hiding the cup from his neighbors with his other hand. Smiling broadly, he announced. "Three aces," and passed the cup to Li Ching.

The only hint of possible potential trouble/suspense is in that business of having to like their companions because it was a matter of survival.

"I agree, Alter. This is a low-grade opening sequence, the mark of a lazy writer who want to in-

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dulge in name-listing and setting the stage before getting down to business. Who is the writer?

That quote was from *Space Visitor* by Mack Reynolds. (Ace, $1.50, 1977.) It shows he is taking his readers somewhat for granted.

"I would hardly have believed it of Reynolds. Are you going to give us another good opener for contrast?"

Of course. I'll even give you two goodies from two of the best-known sf writers. Observe:

> Were they truly intelligent? By themselves, that is? I don't know and I don't how how we can ever find out.
>
> If they were *not* truly intelligent, I hope I never live to see us tangle with anything at all like them which *is* intelligent. I know who will lose. Me. You. The so-called human race.

"That *is* a grabber, Alter. Who wrote it?"

Tell you in a few seconds, Geis. Read this one:

> In the nightime heart of Beirut, in one of a row of general-address transfer booths, Louis Wu flicked into reality.
>
> His foot-length queue was as white and shiny as artificial snow. His skin and depilated scalp were chrome yellow; the irises of his eyes were gold; his robe was royal blue with a golden steroptic dragon superimposed. In the instant he appeared, he was smiling widely showing pearly, perfect standard teeth. Smiling and waving. But the smile was already fading, and in a moment it was gone, and the sag of his face was like a rubber mask melting. Louis Wu showed his age.

"Ahh, Alter. I remember that one."

You should, Geis. The first quote was the opening of *The Puppet Masters* by Robert A. Heinlein. The one you remembered was the first few lines of Larry Niven's *Ringworld*. They both grab in different ways. The Heinlein quote raises all kinds of must-be-answered questions in the reader's mind and he'll read on to find the answers. The Niven quote shows us a future with everyday matter-transmitters and makes us wonder why Wu was faking—perhaps—that smiling goodbye. The passage is exotic, smooth and intriguing. The reader wants to know more, to be further entertained by a writer whom he senses is a hell of a storyteller.

"Alter, are you telling me and our readers, that just by reading the first few paragraphs of a story or a novel, it's possible to judge the merits and entertainment potential of the whole?"

Well, yeah, I think that's true ninety-five per cent of the time. The

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really good writer will show himself instantly. He knows the importance of the first lines, of the first page. The less skilled, the less talented, the less concerned writer, the lazy writer, will betray himself in the first two or three paragraphs. Consider the following:

> I stood behind the pulpit and watched them file smugly into their pews, as they had obviously done every Sunday of their lives and as their parents had all done before them. Life in a small town like Middlefield was built upon such rituals, as I was coming to find out. If you knew everyone who lived around you, and were kept in close proximity to them, you needed such standards of behavior to keep you from tearing their throats out after a couple of years. People deviated from those rituals only at their own risk. In one way, at least, it was comforting—I knew I had a captive audience for the length of my service. After that was anybody's guess.
>
> Light streaming in through the windows made the front pews hotter than the shadowed ones in back, which gave everyone an excuse not to sit close to the front. I wasn't fooled by their excuses; after more than a year in Middlefield, I was still an outsider—the minister from the big city who has invaded the parish of the late lamented Re-

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verend Brand. My predecessor had served this con—

"Hey, Alter, what are you quoting from, some religious novel? Some epic of the Midwest involving a tormented young minister who tries to make improvements, who falls in love with the banker's wife, who suffers a crisis of faith, who—"

Nope, Geis. This is from a science-fiction novel published in nineteen seventy-six.

"How much longer does it go on like that?"

It goes on for *five pages* before anything science fictiony or suspenseful or tension-inducing happens. Five pages of ministerial trivia and setting-of-the-stage and desultory introduction-of-characters, and minor characters at that.

"I don't understand how a competent editor could allow that to get past him."

I don't either, Geis. That quote is from *The Seeker* by David Bischoff and Christopher Lampton. It was Laser Book Number Thirty and the Laser line was edited by Roger Elwood. I suspect that poorly edited and poorly written books like *The Seeker* are major reasons for Laser's failure and death.

"Are you going to inflict any more examples on us? Don't you think you've made your point?"

Yes, I guess I have. There will be screams of agony from certain quarters but I am here asserting that. By Ghod, you *can* judge a book or a story by its first few paragraphs. You *can* take the measure of the writer by how well he treats his readers on the first page. And I would urge readers to make these judgments. Readers are what make science fiction the expanding genre that it is at the moment and unless they are given good stuff to read, they'll simply put down the books and mags and slowly walk away.

"Of course, Alter, this also puts a greater responsibility on the editors since they choose the stories and novels that are published. Are you saying they are or have been lax?"

Yes. Too often they'll be too lazy—or too intimidated by a Big Name Pro—to insist on changes or to do the manuscript editing required.

"Care to give any editorial names?"

I'm not that crazy, Geis. But I will say that ANALOG has had of late a lot of pedestrian stories with dull, tedious beginnings. Ben Bova ought to spend more time in the office with a blue pencil in hand.

"Oh, fine. Now that you've offended the editor who always wins the Best Editor Hugo, do you want to end this column before you stick your pseudopods any farther into your mouth?"

Yeah, okay. This column is ended.

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DIRECTIONS

Dear Mr. Baen:

Regarding Mr. Cooper's letter in the July issue.

Is there really someone out there who does not know why there are so few women who read and write science fiction?

Two or three years ago the editor of a major science-fiction monthly made the statement that few of the stories by women that were submitted were published because they were either poorly written, or "dealt with feminine concerns." Whichever Mr. B. it was should have been given a Golden Pig Award. Speculative fiction always has been, and still is, limited to those concerns that fall into the traditionally masculine sphere.

Also: when I was a young child, my wild play and bookishness were viewed with tolerance. But as soon as my breasts began to show, mother, teachers, priests, and peers began to exert tremendous pressure on me to conform to the image of a "young lady."

Men were the heads of families and did all the thinking. Women were the hearts and were not supposed to think at all. So it was ordained by God.

The girls around me cinched in their waists and turned in their baseball mitts and books.

I refused. There was no one to play baseball with, but there was a library.

In general science and biology I constantly did extra work, not for brownie points, but from fascination. Acoustics, meteorolgy and the aurora sent me to the library every free moment I could glean. I always got A's. I would often linger after class arguing with the teacher or asking him questions, or doing further lab work. Did this man ever encourage me? Ever suggest a career in science, medicine or research? Heavens no! That was for men! Of course it was all right for me to study biology and chemistry. I might want to be a nurse!

I had always hated arithmetic, but algebra was something else. How I loved it! In geometry I soared on tangents, congruities and neat packets of pure logic all wrapped up in QED's. Yet I was programmed for Latin and chemistry, and prevented from taking physics on the grounds that physics was "too difficult" and "took a lot of math." And, of course, I needed the Latin for that nursing career I had no interest in.

When I discovered Heinlein, who was I to share it with? The boys, who had no use for a girl "brain?" The girls, who resolutely avoided anything labeled "masculine?"

When, in my senior year, I stubbornly insisted on taking advanced math rather than the literature course I was programmed for, any psychiatrist of the time would have labeled me as 'sick.' I was still reading adventure yarns at 17. I obviously did not accept my femininity and was afflicted with penis envy. When you guys thrill to swirling galaxies, it's normal. When I do the same, it's "penis envy." Even though women's liberation has made many changes in such attitudes, there are a good many psychiatrists around today who would make a similar evaluation.

The pre-revolutionary Chinese were a

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very barbaric people, we are told. They bound the feet of little girls, crippling them for life in the name of beauty and femininity. We Westerners are so much more civilized. We only bind their minds.

Eleven years after I turned my back on that dreadful but fairly typical small town high school, I finally entered college. By then I was married to a wonderful man, who preferred smart redheads to dumb blondes, and had two children. I went to a junior college and majored in architecture. I took both college transfer and technical-occupational courses. I finally studied physics. My closest women friends, a psychotherapist, a civil engineer and a musicologist, are all avid readers of science fiction.

Dede Wentworth
911 W. Margate Terrace
Chicago, Ill. 60640

Glad to know you saved yourself from the fate of so many other women! Maybe you can answer a question that bugs me: Why are at least half the best *new writers women, even though the total percentage of women entering the field is still low?*

—j.j.p.

Dear Mr. Baen:

In reply to Larry Cooper's letter in your July issue, I must say that he touched a raw nerve.

As a one-time "closet" sf fan and a woman, I am still amazed at the reaction I get from people when I mention that I like sf and science essays. Most, I believe, have never had the slightest contact with either (and I must add that exposure to science classes in high school and college seems to have little bearing on the matter).

Traditionally, women have been excluded from direct knowledge of sf by conditioning in their early years. I fell into this field by accident. While browsing in a local book store on a snowy day, I found nothing to interest me among the best-sellers, and happened to see Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy—and was intrigued by the fact it was a trilogy and (oh horrors!) by the cover.

That was almost ten years ago, and I've been a voracious reader ever since. Over those years, however, I have met very few people who share this interest, and all of them are male.

Obviously, then, there are so few women writing sf because so few know anything about it.

In one of Dr. Asimov's books about his early life, he mentions having read sf magazines. I had *never seen one* on the stands here, or at my previous location in California. GALAXY is my first exposure to sf magazines, and I am enjoying it immensely. Why can't I find GALAXY and other sf magazines at my local store? I even have trouble finding regular sf books. Comment?

Beverly R. Brown
987-4 Crestwood Dr.
Sparks, Nev., 89431

It makes us shudder to think that there are women sf readers so isolated they haven't even heard *of the magazines. If you and others in Sparks can't get your store to stock* GALAXY, *you could* subscribe. *That way, you won't miss the fiction—and you could also follow convention listings in the SF Calendar until you see one near enough to get to and* end *your isolation.*

—j.j.p.

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Dear Mr. Baen:

I'd like to make a few comments on Dr. Pournelle's column about energy from waste ("Can Trash Save Us?" July 1977).

First of all, *An Index of Possibilities: Energy and Power*, is not by the people who did the *Whole Earth Catalog*. *WEC* was put together in California, whereas the *Index* was assembled in Great Britain. Also, it should be pointed out that the *Index* people seem to take a more whimsical approach than the *Whole Earth* people.

There *was* a publication dealing with energy issued in 1974 by the *Whole Earth* people, in collaboration with several other groups, entitled *Energy Primer: Solar, Water, Wind, and BioFuels* (edited by Richard Merrill, Chuck Missar, Thomas Gage, and James Buey, published by Portola Institute).

It deals with "alternative" energy sources, and it devotes a significant amount of space to the utilization of organic wastes. For that matter, *The Last Whole Earth Catalog*, published in 1971, showed interest in the possibility of extracting energy from wastes (see pages 52 and 70). The only reason they didn't give more space to the subject was the relative lack of information at that time. So much for the myth that those concerned about the environment typically follow faddish trends (though there is a segment of the population which clearly does become faddishly "involved" with various "issues," not just ecological ones).

As for Dr. Pournelle's claim that "those who would save the world" hold grossly unrealistic views on the potential of such energy sources, a look at the introduction and biofuel sections of

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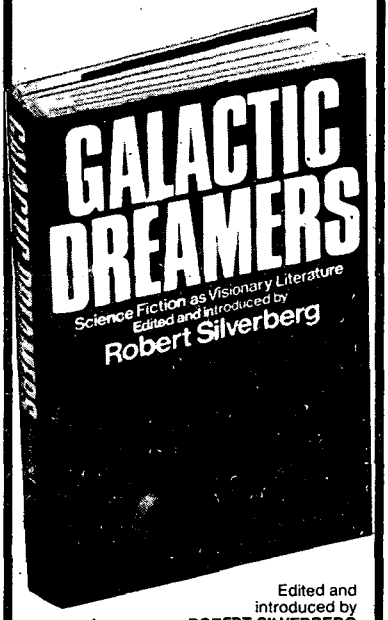

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the *Energy Primer* clearly shows that the authors have an understanding of the limited amount of energy available in waste, and of the technological problems of extracting it.

Peter Roberts
243 Rockingham Road
Pittsburgh, Pa., 15238

p.s.: Dr. Pournelle might be interested to know that the *CoEvolution Quarterly*, a magazine published by *Whole Earth Catalog* people, has given a great deal of coverage to Gerard O'Neill's L-5 colonies, beginning in the Winter 1974 issue. They have published material both favorable and unfavorable to the idea, including items by O'Neill, Russell Schweickart, T.A. Heppenheimer, Eric Drexler, Peter Vajk, and so on. (Incidentally, on page 14 of the Spring 1976 issue Paul Ehrlich, in something of an about-face, comments in a generally favorable way on L-5 colonies, and urges others not to dismiss the idea prematurely.) *CQ* will issue a book on space colonies some time this year.

My apologies: I was told by the chap who sent Index *that it was from the Whole Earth people, and I should have checked further instead of taking his word.*

I remain unrepentant of my remarks about faddish world saviours, but you must understand that I would be more than pleased if those who are "Concerned" about the future were routinely to get good data and hard facts. I am very pleased to hear that some do. I wish those who write me weekly would inform themselves as well as Mr. Roberts seems to have.

Jerry Pournelle

Dear Mr. Pournelle:

I find some basic flaws in your plan for handling nuclear material (which you outlined in the June issue). For instance, what if one of the tanks should develop a leak? If it were being "shipped about" at the time (that seems the most likely time for one of the tanks to start leaking), might it not contaminate a large area before something can be done? And who would go in there to patch it up? It seems your plan is not the solution.

André Guirard
Lafayette, La.

At present, nuclear wastes are stored as very dilute liquids, this largely so that when the inevitable leaks take place, contamination is kept very low. No one has ever thought that storage of millions of gallons of radioactive liquids was more than a temporary expedient; indeed, it was thought that long before now, all those would be removed.

The difficulty is not technological but licensing; the means to convert those liquids into a small-volume solid of glass (with the radioactive particles as part of the glass blocks) of something less than 50 cubic foot dimensions for all *the nuclear wastes accumulated since the Manhattan Project—is available.*

Agreed: that the shipment of vast quantities of liquid nuclear waste is hardly a reasonable proposition, but that is not what is proposed. When the lawyers are finished arguing the matter, it will be turned into glass blocks, which can then be put wherever one likes; the Mojave as a temporary expedient seems reasonable to me. Glass is, after all, a very stable material—and it doesn't rain much in the desert.

Jerry Pournelle

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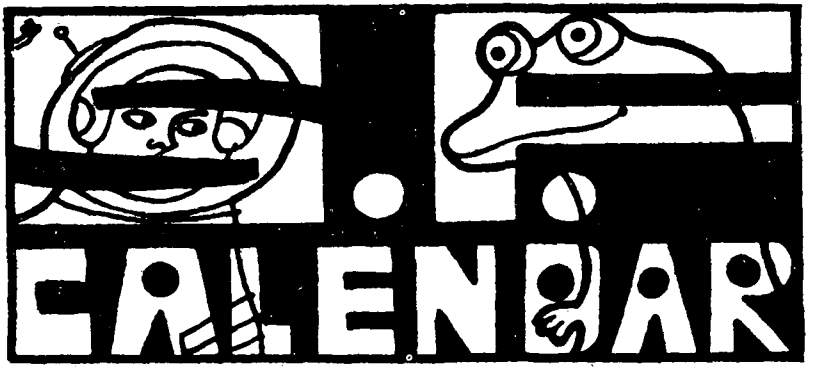

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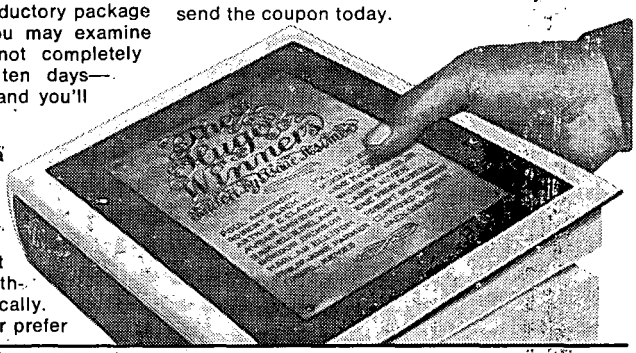

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